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THE NEW MONTECRISTO



OR, The Wandering Jew of the Sea.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLA BY THE SEA.

MOONLIGHT in a Southern, sunny land!

The gentle sighing of the breeze through the majestic pines, the murmur of the surf upon the sandy beach, the occasional hoot of an owl in the dark forest in the background, or the deep bay of a hound over in the negro quarter, the only sounds to break the stillness, and sounds that it were a pleasure, a relief to hear, that one enjoying the scene might know that all nature was not asleep.

It was a lovely picture there on the Atlantic coast, with a grand old villa, rambling and somber, a spreading lawn running down to the sea, and the background a heavy forest.

The air floating about the villa was scented with the perfume of many flowers, the dew glittered like diamonds upon the grass, and out upon the deep waters was visible a white sail, standing inshore under a five-knot breeze.

"MAN, GHOST OR DEVIL, COME ON AND FACE ME, FOR I YIELD NOT AN INCH
TO YOU TO NIGHT!"

Suddenly another sound broke the stillness of the night, and the low notes of a guitar were heard, while, a moment after, a voice arose in song.

It was a woman's voice, rich-toned, sympathetic, and musical, singing a sailor's song of farewell.

In beautiful cadence the words were voiced:

"Farewell! farewell! the voice you hear
Has left its last soft tone with you;
Its next must join the seaward cheer,
And shout among the shouting crew.

"The accents which I scarce would form
Beneath your frown's controlling check,
Must give the word above the storm,
To cut the mast and clear the wreck.

"The timid eye I dared not raise—
The hand that shook when pressed to thine,
Must point the guns upon the chase,
Must bid the deadly cutlass shine.

"To all I love, or hope, or fear,
Honor or own, a long adieu!
To all that life has true or dear,
Farewell, save memory of you."

As the last words died away a mocking-bird, awakened from its slumber in a cedar near by, broke forth in melody, and rising, the fair one who had been singing leant over the railing of the piazza and listened to the pealing notes of the songster, as

"Far away off in echoes sublime,
They broke on the night-wind's sigh."

"Sing on, sweet bird, for I will gladly cease my song to hear yours," she said, in pleasant tones, and then her eyes glanced over the moonlit scene, and clasping her hands, she said, earnestly:

"Oh, how beautiful! and how happy I am here in this beautiful old home which my brother has brought me to.

"The negroes say that it is haunted, and that it has been the history of the house to bring only ill-fortune to those who dwell here; but we are happy, Mark and I, and the only ghosts that haunt me are those of the past which I knew when I was the captive to those cruel wreckers.

"Ah, me! I wish Mark were here to enjoy this lovely scene with me."

As she spoke she drew her trailing skirts about her, and descending to the gravel walk, strolled toward the sea, halting in a small miniature fort that stood there.

As the moonlight streamed brightly down upon her it revealed the wondrous loveliness of her face and the perfect outline of her form.

She was scarcely more than eighteen, and yet her face possessed the thoughtful repose of a woman.

It was a face to love and almost revere, as one might that of the Madonna, and yet there lurked that in it that showed a brave heart and daring spirit beneath.

She was dressed in pure white, and rich jewels that she wore sparkled brilliantly in the moonlight.

"Ah, a sail in sight!" she exclaimed, as her eyes fell upon the snowy canvas of the vessel, now about a league ashore.

"How that craft, on such a night as this carries my thoughts far back to my childhood days, spent on that lone island of the Bahamas!

"It makes me shudder to think what I then was, innocent though I was of doing any wrong; but those days I must bury too deep for even memory to recall, for Mark does not wish to speak of them.

"That vessel is coming this way; but we have no cause for fear, here, though somehow a feeling of dread comes upon me when I gaze upon yonder sail— Oh! I know now why it is; it is one of those lateen-rigged vessels I so often saw in the far Southern waters, and never see here.

"But it is late and I must return to the house," and drawing her dress again about her, she returned to the piazza, and after another lingering gaze at the beauty of the night, entered the grand hall of the villa.

There, upon every side, was the indication of wealth, and trophies of the chase adorned the walls, while a massive sideboard was laden down with silver plate.

Crossing the spacious hall, which was also used at times as a company dining-room, the maiden entered a large, luxuriously-furnished room, with a smaller one adjoining.

These were her apartments, and about her seemed all that heart could desire to make the body comfortable and please the eye.

The inner room was a sleeping-chamber, and upon a Turkish rug was lying asleep a negress.

"Chloe, it is bed-time, so awake and aid me," she said, pleasantly.

A murmur of assent, and the negress slept on complacently.

"Poor Chloe! She is worn out from attending the dance at the quarters last night, and, as I am not sleepy, I will read while she enjoys another half-hour of slumber," said the maiden, throwing herself into an easy-chair and taking up a book.

For awhile she read, then her eyelids drooped, her head dropped back upon the cushioned chair, and she, too, slept.

An hour thus passed, and she awoke with a start and cry of alarm, for standing before her was the tall form of a man, wearing the fanciful attire of a sea rover, and armed to the teeth!

CHAPTER II.

A GHOST ON GUARD.

MOONLIGHT on the sea! A strange-looking craft, seldom seen in the North Atlantic waters, gliding along under a five-knot breeze.

Land in sight, a little over a league away, and the bows of the vessel pointing shoreward—a foreign-looking craft, lateen rigged, and with a suspicious air about her, one that smacked of buccaneers.

An armed deck, all trim and shipshape, and a motley crew of savage-looking men, in whose faces could be traced half a dozen nationalities.

They were dressed in a picturesque garb, armed, and if there was an honest man among them he belied his looks, for Nature had stamped the brow of every one with the word:

"Villain!"

Upon the quarter-deck were a group of officers, the youngest of which was the commander of the suspicious-looking craft, and though his face was handsome, as far as perfection of feature went, it wore the indelible brand of cruelty and evil.

His dress was fanciful, and of velvet, while his cutlass-hilt was studded with gems, and the two pistols he wore in a red silk sash were gold-mounted.

His manners were brusque, yet possessed of a certain refinement, and he seemed vain and haughty.

"I see white walls, yonder, Baricas, glimmering in the moonlight among the trees," said the young commander, holding his glass to his eye, and addressing a white-haired old man who stood near him, and who was evidently an officer.

"It is the villa, Senor Capitan."

"And there flashed a light in it! I thought you said that it was deserted?" added the other, quickly.

"It is peopled only by ghosts, senor, and if you beheld a light, it was held in spirit hands," impressively answered the old man.

"Bah! I am giving up my ideas of ghosts and spooks, after all that I have seen exposed that had a weird, supernatural look, and I'll enter the ruin be there a score of spirits to confront me," recklessly said the captain.

"You are just the man, Captain Perdido, that I have been searching for these twenty years past, for I confess to fears of the dead, and those that walk the earth o' nights after they have been decently laid in their graves.

"It is now twenty-one years since I gazed on yonder old ruin, and I was a young man then, and only hard luck and an empty pocket have forced me to divulge the secret it hides to you, and offer to pilot you there now, for, what I saw that night, long ago, turned my hair the color it is now, within the hour."

"And what did you see, Baricas, that was so terrible?" asked the captain lightly, seemingly not impressed with the lieutenant's story.

"Captain Perdido, you say you do not believe in ghosts; but I do, for I saw one that night of my own making.

"To tell the truth, when I was a youth, just verging on manhood, I was rather wild and ran through all that my father allowed me, and what my twin brother gave me, for he was most generous to me.

"Driven to desperation by debt, and knowing that my father had a secret vault in the old mansion, filled with gold, I determined to get from it all I needed.

"The entrance was through my father's room in one wing of the house, and none knew of it besides himself excepting my brother and myself, and he made the secret known to us, in case he might suddenly die and leave no record of it.

"Well, I waited until my father left home on a hunting-expedition, and at midnight sought the vault.

"As I was about to raise the stone, some one stepped upon it, and in dismay I saw that it was my brother.

"He had suspected my intention and determined to thwart it; but I was reckless—ay, desperate, and refusing to listen to his entreaties, thrust him aside. Instantly he again stepped upon the stone, and, frenzied by his act, I drew a pistol and shot him!

"He fell his length upon the stone, while I, horrified at my act, fled from the vault, the home and the estate, putting to sea in an open boat. I was picked up, days after, by a pirate craft, and from that day I became an outlaw.

"Several years after, when coming near the villa, I sent a man there to find out what had gone on at the old place. He returned with the news that, three years before, my father had been thrown from his horse just as he had returned from hunting, and was instantly killed, while my brother had been found at the same time sitting dead at the writing-table that stood over the trap-door leading to the vault, and in his hand was a pen with which he had written the following words ere he died:

"Father, I am dying from a bullet-wound, and with my last breath I ask you to forever leave this hated place, which is fatal to our race. It is haunted by bad memories, and its roof brings ill-omen to all who dwell beneath.

"Leave it, I—"

"This is where the writing ended, and I forgot to say that my grandfather who built the villa was killed there by robbers, his wife became mad with grief and took her own life, and my mother, while sitting on the piazza, watching a thunder-storm, was struck dead by lightning.

"To these deaths did my brother refer.

"With my father dead, and my brother dying at the table, a bullet wound in his heart, and I gone, no one knew where, the servants were in dismay; the old villa was shut up and the slaves sent to the home of a cousin of mine, leagues away. So the man I sent after information told me, while the villa was considered haunted and shunned by the people far and near.

"As my brother after receiving my shot had left the vault, closed the secret trap after him, and ascended to the room above, I felt confident that the gold had not been discovered, and the secret remained known only to myself.

"So I determined to get the gold.

"Going in a small craft by night, I ran into the little harbor—you see it opening there now, Captain Perdido—and went alone to the villa.

"I entered the cellar, for in that way, by a secret door, I could get into the vault as well as through the library, and with my lantern in my hand I made my way to the spot.

"A deep groan suddenly startled me as I reached the vault, and, glancing up quickly, I beheld, not ten feet from me, standing upon the very stone where I had last seen him, my brother!"

"I thought that you had killed him?" indifferently said Captain Perdido.

"And so I had; but this was his ghost, still guarding the treasure from me."

"And what did you do, Baricas?"

"I dashed down my lantern, staggered out of the cellar, and fled like a deer to the beach.

"Going on board the sloop I ordered the crew to set sail at once, and throwing myself down in my cabin, I tried long to get back my nerve.

"At last I went on deck, and my men gazed at me in amazement, for in that time my hair had turned snow-white, yes, as white as you see it now."

"This is remarkable; but you should have gotten your gold, which is rightly your inheritance, though I am glad now that you did not."

"And so am I, for it will come better now, when I am getting along in years, and intend to give up this wild roving life."

"You think it is still there then, Baricas?"

"Oh, yes, captain, it is still there, for no one could solve the secret of the treasure-vault without having it shown to him."

"Well, we shall soon know, and if it is there, neither dead nor living shall prevent me from getting it," recklessly said Captain Perdido, while, a moment after, he added:

"By Heaven, Baricas, the villa is inhabited."

"You are right, captain, for there shines a light in the hallway; but whoever dwells there knows not the secret of the vault, and we must reach it, even if it costs a dozen lives."

"You are right, Baricas, we must have the gold, so call two boat-loads of men to accompany us, and let them go doubly armed.

"Now take the helm, as you know these waters, and run the craft to an anchorage, while I prepare for my trip ashore."

CHAPTER III.

FATAL TO HIS RACE.

"WELL, Baricas, this is as snug a harbor as any craft would wish in a storm, and I see those who live here enjoy a sail, for look at the pleasure-craft."

The remark was made by Captain Perdido to his lieutenant, who was at the helm, as the lateen-rigged vessel ran slowly into the little haven opposite the old villa.

The anchor was let fall silently, the boats lowered and filled with men, and the marauders were rowed shoreward with muffled oars.

"It is midnight, Baricas, the very time for a ghost to be prowling around."

"Yes, Captain Perdido, but the old house is occupied, as you see who—by, God only knows—and the presence of the living I hope has driven off the spirits of the dead."

"And I fear me the living have gotten off with the gold, too."

"No fear of their doing that, for the secret of the vault could not be discovered, I am confident. I only hope we will not see my brother's spirit standing guard over the vault, for it would kill me outright, and I feel strangely gloomy to-night."

"Nonsense, man, you should not have the glooms upon the eve of getting your inheritance; but are you ready to go on?"

"I am, sir."

"How far is it to the house?"

"About a hundred paces."
 "The lawn is open, I believe?"
 "With the exception of a few trees and ornamental hedge-rows."

"Well, the men can hide behind the hedges while we go on to the mansion," and they ascended the brick stairway leading from the bank above to the beach, and were upon the lawn.

The grounds were well kept, and the mansion looked little like the old ruin Baricas had expected to find it.

Lights were visible in several windows, and the whole scene was mellowed by the moonlight.

Placing his men behind a hedge-row, Captain Perdido bade them stand ready to come at the slightest call, while he and the degenerate heir went toward the mansion.

They approached it without beholding any one, and stepping upon the broad piazza stood gazing around them.

"Those who dwell here live in luxury, Baricas, and they doubtless are rich in silver-plate and jewels, so, if we lose your treasure we have something to fall back upon."

"Sh, captain," said Baricas, awed by the spot where he stood, the memories it recalled and the moonlit scene about him.

"Come, man, banish your apprehensions, and let us enter the mansion and get to work—ah! here is a tempting sideboard, and I'll warrant these liquors are the best."

"A bumper to you, Baricas, and may you yet dwell here, as master of your inheritance, and entertain me right royally!"

He had poured out two goblets of wine from a decanter, and the two dashed it off, Baricas with a hand that shook like an aspen.

"Still nervous, old man? Well, that wine will give you courage. Now, which is the room that has the vault beneath it?"

Baricas pointed in silence to a door on the right, and without hesitation, but treading softly, Captain Perdido stepped forward and entered it.

The scene that met his gaze was a strange one, and he started back for an instant.

But again entering, he muttered:

"An angel in Paradise!"

There, in an easy, silken chair, sat the fair mistress of the domain, and her head was thrown back, as it had fallen when she dropped to sleep.

A silver lamp shed its soft rays upon her exquisite face and form and revealed every article in the luxuriously-furnished room.

Upon the mat before the fireplace lay the negress, deep in dreamland, as was her mistress, and the intrusion of a pirate chief disturbed neither of them.

"Beautiful as a Peri, and wearing a king's ransom in jewels," said Captain Perdido, and he motioned to Baricas to enter.

"Great heavens! what vision of loveliness is that who dwells beneath this ill-omened roof?" said the Sea Rover's lieutenant, in a hoarse whisper.

"God knows, and yet—her face is strangely familiar to me. Where have I seen it before?—Ha! she awakens!"

The man would have started back, but it was too late, for the beautiful eyes rested full upon him, and with a cry of alarm the maiden was upon her feet.

One glance into his face and she uttered another cry and from her lips came the ringing words:

"Perdido, the Pirate, I know you!"

"As I now do you, my sweet Girl Wrecker," was the response of Captain Perdido.

"What do you here, sir?" the maiden demanded, haughtily.

"I came on a little expedition for gold, not expecting to find here so fair a treasure."

"But, may I ask, what you are doing here? When last I saw you it was as the Girl Wrecker of the Bahamas," said the man, with a sneer.

"I dwell here with my brother, and would to Heaven he were here now to resent the intrusion of a self-confessed pirate into his home."

"Ah! your words tell me that you are alone, and I confess that I am glad, for I remember your brother as one whose daring sought you out, and took you from the Wreckers' Island, where you had so long dwelt."

"But come, my sweet Pearl of the Sea, you are to go with me as my prize, while my men get the rich booty this house affords, and your gallant brother will have to pay the ransom of a princess to get you back, as he can well do, dwelling in such luxury as this."

"Ho, Chloe! awake! awake, and call the men!" cried the maiden, and the now frightened negress sprang to her feet with a scream of terror, to quickly sink again upon the floor, and in a deep swoon, akin to death.

Seeing this, the young girl suddenly seized the lamp and dashed it full at the head of the bold intruder.

Springing aside he avoided the blow, and the lamp shivered to fragments against the wall, and the room was in total darkness.

"Quick, Baricas, your lamp! and get to that vault and open it, while I find that savage beauty and stop her piping, or she will have the

slaves upon us in full force— Ah! there she goes!" and Perdido rushed forward as the maiden suddenly sprang through an open window out upon the lawn.

Instantly he followed her, and with the speed of a deer they sped across the sward; but tripping upon her skirts the poor girl fell, and before she could rise he had seized her in his strong arms.

Rudely he placed his hand over her mouth, but not until she had uttered several piercing cries for help, and then twisting her scarf about her face, and securing her hands with the ends, he raised her in his arms and bore her back to the mansion, again entering the room in which was now another light.

It was the lantern of Baricas, and he just stepped up from a trap in the floor as Perdido entered with his captive.

At that moment running feet were heard without, and a sailor darted upon the piazza, crying:

"Quick, captain, for our old enemy, the cruiser, is coming up the coast and nearly upon us. You have no time to lose, sir."

"Ay, ay! Get the men into the boats! Come, Baricas, another time for the treasure, for it will keep if it is there and I have a prize here that will bring us gold— Great God! she has escaped me!"

Suddenly the maiden had sprung from his grasp, but with one hand, which she had freed, she had seized one of the pistols in his belt, and, instead of flying as he had feared, turned at bay when across the room.

"Seize her, Baricas!" cried Captain Perdido, adding: "She is a woman and can of course do you no harm with that weapon."

But, knowing something of the girl as he did, Captain Perdido took good care not to run upon the muzzle of the weapon she held.

Baricas, however, seemed to have no fear of a pistol in a woman's hand, and sprang forward to obey the order of his chief, to start back as the weapon flashed, clasp his hand upon his heart, and sink to the floor, crying:

"Good God! I have met my death also beneath this fatal roof."

With the fall of his lieutenant, knowing now that the girl could do him no harm, Captain Perdido rushed forward, seized her in his arms, and bore her rapidly from the house, calling back:

"Come, Baricas, if you are able."

But no response came, nor did any form follow him, and the pirate chief fled rapidly across the lawn just as a gang of slaves came rushing around the corner of the villa, brought from their quarters by the cry of their young mistress.

To gain his boats, spring into the stern sheets of one, still carrying his prize, and give the order to pull for his vessel, was the work of an instant, and in dismay the negroes saw their mistress borne away without their power to save her, and watched the fleet craft fly from the little harbor and stand seaward under full sail, closely pursued by a vessel-of-war that opened fire upon her as soon as she discovered her running out from the land.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET OF A VAULT.

"Oh Heaven, have mercy! What foe has dealt me this bitter, cruel blow?"

The speaker was a young man of hardly more than twenty-two, though in his face there was a calm dignity and sternness which caused him to look older.

He had ridden up to the door of the villa, and dismounting from his spirited horse, an old servant had met him and taken his bridle-rein, at the same time making known to him the terrible news that at midnight the harbor had been visited by a vessel and the fair mistress of the villa carried off.

The young horseman would serve well as a model for Hercules, so superb was his physique, while his face was that of an Adonis, and his movements as graceful as a woman's.

He was attired in top-boots and hunting-jacket, a sombrero sheltered his haughty head, and in his hands he grasped a rifle, while about him were grouped a pack of hounds.

After uttering the words that open this chapter, and which came with a burst of sorrow from his heart, he turned again to the negro, from whose lips he had heard the news that so deeply moved him.

"Lucas, tell me just when and how my sister was stolen from my home—and mind you, give me every clew you can as to who were the perpetrators of the cruel and fiendish act?"

He spoke calmly now, and while nerving himself, as though to hear a bitter story, he glanced down from the sloping lawn to the small inlet, or haven, wherein lay at anchor his schooner yacht, of some thirty tons burden, and several smaller craft.

"Well, massa, as nigh as I 'members, what happened, for I were a mighty skeert, sah, we was a-dancin' over in ther quarter, havin' a second night o' it arter Sally's weddin', when all of a sudden we heerd a wild cry which we know'd came from Missy Lita's pretty mouth."

"She was alone with Chloe, as we know'd, sah, for she had told all of the house-servants to go over to the dance, and we runned here as quick as we could, and seen a tall man carryin' Missy Lita off in his arms."

"It was bright moonlight, Lucas?"

"Yes, sah, and we seen him plain."

"Describe him."

"He were tall and slender-like, and had a black mustache, sah, while he was dressed fanciful like, you know, sah."

"Well, where were his boats?"

"On the basin beach, sah."

"And his vessel?"

"Standin' off an' on in the harbor, sah; but I thinks she had just got up anchor."

"And the boats went out to her?"

"Yes, sah, and then she put out to sea."

"A schooner?"

"She were a craft like a slaver I seen off the coast some years ago, sah, what you call lateen rig."

"Ah! a West Indian! but go on with your story, Lucas," said the young man with perfect calmness.

"Well, massa, the pirate craft stood out to sea, and then we saw why she was in such a hurry, for a war-vessel was coming up the coast and gave her chase, sah."

"What was the vessel?"

"It brig-o'-war, sah, and very fast; but the pirate had a fair start and gained slightly, both of 'em firing awful hot."

"And the pirate escaped?"

"I fear so, sah, for thar were no sign of either of 'em at daylight, sah, and we has been here ever since, mournin' for poor Missy Lita and hoping you would come, sah, for thar has been red work in ther house, sah, and none o' us daren't enter arter seein' it, and Chloe hain't nowhar ter be seen, tho' ther pirates didn't carry her off as we know of."

But the young man was no longer a listener, for he had at once entered the mansion, after hearing Lucas's word that there had been red work within.

The door of the maiden's room was closed, but he quickly opened it, and stepped inside.

The room was in wild disorder, for the carpet had been torn up where the trap-door was, and that stood open.

Then there were several chairs overturned, and lying upon the floor was a human form.

It was the pirate, Baricas, and he was dead, a look of horror upon his upturned face, and his blood had stained the carpet.

And against the wall there was a stain, and beneath it the fragments of the silver lamp, while across the threshold of the door leading to the inner room was the form of the negress.

"This man is dead, and who could have shot him?— Ah! here is the weapon, and it is not mine."

"Can poor Chloe be dead, too?"

As he spoke the young man, with white, stern face, walked across to where the negress lay and knelt by her side.

"Yes, she, too, is dead; but I see no wound, and the expression upon her face indicates that she died of fright."

"Great God! what scenes have been enacted here the past night, and what has not my poor sister suffered!"

Crushing a groan between his teeth, the man arose and approached the open trap.

"This is strange! I knew not of the existence of such a door in the flooring. What can it mean, for I see iron steps leading below into a chamber I knew not was there!"

"I will solve this mystery, and at once!"

And seizing the lantern of the dead pirate, which was still burning, he descended the iron ladder to the vault below.

It was a small room, walled up, that he found himself in, and with an iron door leading evidently into some passageway, for no lock or hasp was visible upon the inner side.

Turning, the man started, in spite of his nerve, for his feet struck against a pile of bones.

"Ha! some one has been left here to die," he exclaimed as he regarded the heap of bones, half-covered with threads of clothing, and with one bony finger still encircled by a ring in which sparkled a gem of great beauty.

"Yes, I think I can solve the mystery of this poor wretch being here, now I see yonder open trap, and it has been lately opened, too," he said, as his eyes fell upon a slab in the flooring which had lately been raised, and working upon hinges beneath, was bent entirely over until it lay flat upon the pavement.

In this cavity thus revealed was an iron box, and gazing calmly down upon his discovery, the bold intruder into the vault said, aloud:

"This tells the story, for a treasure is buried here. Yonder pile of bones can be none other than the remains of the planter who inherited the estate after the tragic death of his uncle and cousins, and would not dwell here, as he feared the ill-omen of the place to his race."

"It was said he resembled his twin cousins in a remarkable degree, and disappearing mysteriously, no clew has ever been found of his whereabouts; but I think these bones are the key to the mystery, for, with a knowledge of this secret treasure-vault, he doubtless came

here alone, that iron door closed upon him with its spring-lock, and here he died.

"But another knew the secret, too, for the trap is open leading to the room above, which was the master's chamber, I believe, and he came here for the treasure, and, after opening the vault, fled without it.

"I wonder if he is the one who lies in the room above?

"Ha! can it be that it is one of the twin brothers—he who so mysteriously disappeared on the day of his brother's and father's death?

"Well, whoever he be, he has unlocked the secret for me, and, having purchased the place, the treasure is mine.

"For the present I will let it rest," and the man went to the room above, and, after discovering the hidden spring that opened the trap-door in the floor, he lowered it, replaced the carpet, and then called the negroes, who were waiting in alarm outside, to come into the chamber of death.

CHAPTER V.

A GHOSTLY INTRUDER.

AGAIN it was night in the villa by the sea.

The dead body of poor Chloe had been taken to the cabin of her mourning kindred, who were wailing over her sad fate, and the loss of Lita, whom they dearly loved, her devotion to them, during the two years she had dwelt at Villa Haven, as the plantation was called, having won their humble hearts.

Baricas, the pirate, was taken to a grave out in the timber, and consigned to his last rest without a prayer.

In looking over some old, time-worn papers found upon the body, something of deep interest had met the eye of the young master of Villa Haven, and he had placed them aside for a future reading.

Having looked after the dead, Mark Bonodel had sent a messenger to the nearest port to engage there a crew for his yacht, intending to set sail in her as soon as he could fit her out, and go upon the search for his sister, for he did not doubt but that she had been taken for the purpose of demanding a large ransom for her return.

When night came on, after partaking of his lonely supper in silence, he told Lucas and the other servants that they could retire, and he at once sought the piazza.

With a cigar between his teeth he began to pace up and down the long stretch of the piazza, his thoughts busy, his heart and brain on fire with the emotions that came upon him.

"Poor little Lita," he murmured: "I will ransom her, if it takes every dollar I have in the world; or, if she will not be given up for gold, then will I get her back with lead and steel, if I search for her from one end of the earth to the other.

"Two short years of joy together in this old home and here she is stolen from me, and taken, perhaps, to the very haunts of those who held her captive from early childhood.

"Our father ruined in fortune by a designing villain, and then murdered, to get him out of the way; our mother dying of a broken heart, and poor Lita, stolen in childhood, and reared among wreckers, and I cast adrift upon the wide world.

"And all the work of that accursed man! But I avenged my parents, and Fate aided me to capture that pirate craft and with it be able to find my sister, but to lose her again, as I have done.

"I have foes, I know, and it was to hide from them, to hide myself from those who might know me and Lita that I came here, and bought this home with the treasure I found on the pirate schooner I captured.

"But I fear me that some one has traced us here, and, did I not know that man was dead, I would believe that he was upon our track, for this kidnapping is strangely like the blow he would strike."

And thus he mused on in bitter thought, unmindful of the moonlit scene spread out before him, and hearing not the sighing of the wind through the pines, the fall of the surf upon the beach, or the trilling of the mocking-bird in the cedars.

Suddenly he came to a halt with the words:

"Ah! I had forgotten the letters taken from that white-haired pirate—ay, and the secret that the iron box in the vault holds! I will at once solve these mysteries."

With these words he entered the house and sought his sister's rooms, the scene of the double tragedy of the night before.

Seating himself by the table, in the chair where his sister had sunk to sleep, he took out the time-worn bundle of papers.

Glancing carefully over them, he threw them one after the other aside, until presently he cried, as his eyes fell upon one:

"By Heaven! it is as I suspected:

"This paper tells the story, and that the white-haired pirate I buried to-day in the pines was none other than Monte Cristo, the heir to this plantation of Villa Haven.

"Yes, he was the twin brother who disappeared so strangely, as the story goes, the day his brother died, by a bullet in this very room,

and his father was thrown from his horse and killed.

"How strange, how passing strange that I should solve the mystery, known to no one else than I, and that the proofs are in my hand!

"Ha! what a strange thought flashes through my brain!

"Dare I do it? Dare I proclaim myself the son of that fugitive, Monte Cristo, and drop my own name for his?

"Ay, will I! for my own name has brought me only ill-fortune, and no heirs now live to this estate of the Monte Cristos, which I have bought, so that I can defraud no one of their rights.

"These papers will prove what I wish proven, and from to-night I will be Monte Cristo of Villa Haven, and forever sink for my sister and myself the name of Bonodel."

He seemed greatly excited as he spoke, and clutching the papers tightly, he arose and paced to and fro, his face set with stern resolve.

At last he paused, and placing the papers carefully away in his breast-pocket, he said:

"Now to pay a visit to the vault below, and see what that long-buried iron box contains, which has already cost two men their lives."

Taking the pirate's lantern which was on the table near, he lighted it, and locking the doors, drew aside the carpets, and then, searching for the spring which he had noted the night before, touched it and the trap flew up.

Into the depths of the vault he unhesitatingly descended, and setting the lantern down, bent over the iron box.

There was no lock upon it, and it, too, evidently opened with a spring.

After a long search he found the spring; the heavy lid flew up, and a cry broke from his lips as the contents were revealed to his astounded gaze.

But just then he heard a sound that caused him to start.

From whence did it come? Was it one of the servants at the door to see him?

No, the sound seemed to come from within the vault.

Could it be rats?

No, not in that stone-walled vault.

It was a scraping sound, and one he could not account for.

Suddenly he placed it, and wheeled toward the iron door he had seen upon his former visit to the vault.

Yes, the sound came from there, and it was evident that some hand on the outer side was searching for a spring.

Brave as a man could be, he certainly was, and as free from superstition as any one of those times, when all believed in the supernatural; but in spite of his iron nerve, he felt a thrill of horror at what he might have to face.

Would it be man or spirit?

He would know in an instant more, for suddenly the iron door quivered, as if from a pressure from without, and then, with a creaking sound suddenly swung open upon its rusty hinges, and the glare of the lantern fell dimly upon the second intruder into the secret treasure-vault of the Monte Cristos.

"Great God! it is a ghost," cried Monte Cristo.

Then in a ringing voice he cried:

"Man, ghost or devil, come on and face me, for I yield not one inch to you this night!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMBAT IN THE TREASURE-VAULT.

If the man who had so strangely assumed the name of Monte Cristo—a name of ill omen to those who had borne it in the past—was startled at seeing a form enter the secret vault, through a door which he felt confident had not been opened for twenty years, the one who thus entered seemed also taken aback at the sight of the occupant of the underground treasure-room.

The midnight intruder was dressed in white, even wearing a snowy tarpaulin upon his head, and his face was as pallid as though life had left it.

If not a ghost, the spirit of some one of the departed Monte Cristos of the villa, he certainly looked it.

His dress was that of a sailor. In one hand he carried a lantern, in the other a cutlass, which had been hanging by his side, but which he had grasped when brought face to face with the bold occupant of the vault.

Monte Cristo, on his part, was also clad in white linen, for the weather was warm, and a snowy smoking-cap was upon his head.

Why he had done so he could not understand, but he had taken with him a jewel-hilted cutlass into the vault.

This he now grasped in his hand, and standing half in the shadow, as the lantern he had brought cast its rays before him, he did not look unlike a ghostly visitant also.

When he challenged the midnight marauder to meet him his voice had sounded most hollow and strange in his own ears, resounding as it did through the close-walled vault.

For full a moment the two men stood gazing at each other in silence, and in that time the nerves of Monte Cristo became like iron once more, while the other seemed to grow a trifle

nervous, as though he looked upon the holder of the vault as a being not of this world.

"Well, sir, if you have come here for the treasure this vault holds, there it lies," said Monte Cristo, breaking the silence, and again his voice sounded unnatural to him.

"Shipmate, I came for the treasure, and seeing as I am human, and consequently need gold, and you have gone to a better land, I think you ought to yield the booty to me who can make use of it," said the intruder, speaking in a calm manner and with something of entreaty in his tones.

"He mistakes me for a ghost," muttered Monte Cristo, and then he thought:

"I will carry the idea out, and see what the result will be."

Aloud he answered, and purposely he made his voice sepulchral:

"Man of earth, you came here to rob this vault of its gold that you may squander it in riotous living; and I, of the spirit-land, am here to guard it that it may do some good in the world at the proper time."

Not at all abashed, the intruder replied:

"Well, you may be a spirit, good or evil, but the gold is real, and I am flesh and blood, and you should therefore let me have the booty."

"No, it is reserved for others."

"Well, they'll not get it, for I am taking big chances for the contents of that iron box, and I'm going to get the treasure!" and he started forward.

"Stand back, sir!" sternly cried Monte Cristo, raising his cutlass.

But the man coolly placed his lantern upon the floor, so as to throw its light upon the center of the vault, and baring his arm he also raised his cutlass.

"Mortal, do you dare me?" sternly cried Monte Cristo.

"Mate, I'm sorry to call to quarters to fight one who has served his time on earth and sailed for a spirit-land, but I have come here for that gold-chest, and I intend to have it," was the stubborn response.

"Back, sir, or I will cause you to rue your hardihood!"

"Mate, I have never met my equal with this same weapon I hold in my hand among mortals, and I've been on many a red deck, and I hain't afraid to measure blades with you, if it does smell of sulphur and is hot from the regions down below."

"If you drop me, then I'll be such as you now are, and you seem to cruise 'round amazing life-like; and if I down you, then I'll get the gold, and do what no other man has ever done—kill a ghost."

Monte Cristo was struck by the man's fearless mien, but having done all he could to warn him off, he had but one course to pursue, and that was to meet him in deadly combat.

This the intruder seemed anxious to begin, and with a spring, without a word of warning, he faced Monte Cristo.

The blades came together with a clash, and then the two men paused, each measuring the other's strength.

"You've got a good grip, messmate, for a spirit-hand, and your blade has the true ring in it; but here goes!"

With his words he made what he intended should be a killing stroke.

But it was neatly parried, as was also a lightning-like thrust, and several quick passes that followed.

"Your hand hasn't lost its cunning, shipmate, from being overheated down below, for you are a good swordsman, and I guess I've undertaken a big job; but here goes for the gold."

Again he began the fighting, and for full a minute he used every device known to him, to get under the guard of his adversary, and was cleverly foiled each time.

Maddened by his failure, and the fact that he met one who was up to all his feats of cunning with a weapon, he again attacked Monte Cristo savagely, and in a way that showed he was becoming desperate.

Monte Cristo so far had acted upon the defensive, for, confident of his own powers, he wished to tire out his adversary and then disarm him.

But now he felt that his life was at stake against the frenzied attack of the man, and he determined to disarm him at once.

This he found not easy to do, and the man growing more frenzied in his attack, he struck up his guard and drove his weapon into his heart.

The blade of the intruder fell upon the stone floor with a loud ring, and, as a groan of anguish broke from the lips of the man, he sunk in his tracks.

"Messmate, you have done for me; but I beg you to sail in company with me on the voyage I've got to take, for I don't know the charts of the spirit-seas."

"My poor fellow, I am no ghost, but real flesh and blood, and the owner of this villa, defending my rights," said Monte Cristo, frankly.

The wounded man gazed fixedly into the face of Monte Cristo, and asked:

"Are you the Senor Bonodel?"

"Yes, I am the owner of Villa Haven."

"You are the brother of the Girl Wrecker?"
 "My sister was once kidnapped by wreckers, and held captive on their island," was the answer.
 "And you captured a pirate craft, got a crew, and cruised the seas until you found her, your vessel being known as the Flagless Schooner?"
 "Yes, for I had no right to any flag."
 "Well, you are the man I came to seek."
 "And you have found me," was the laconic response.
 "I have, for a certainty; but I thought you were a ghost, as my shipmate said the treasure was guarded by a spirit."
 "Who and what are you, my man?"
 "Will this wound kill me?"
 "Yes."
 "No hope?"
 "None, for my blade went deep, and you are bleeding to death."
 "Well, it's my fate, and I'm not one to whine about it," was the philosophical response.
 "Again I ask, who and what are you?"
 "I am known as Bob Binnacle; I hold the rank of mate, and I am a pirate," was the matter-of-fact reply.

CHAPTER VII. THE RANSOM.

"A PIRATE! and did you serve on the lateen-rigged craft that visited this coast last night?"
 "I did, sir."
 "By Heaven! the very craft that bore my sister off?"
 "Yes, the identical vessel."
 "Then my blade has not gone wrong in taking your life," sternly said Monte Cristo.
 The man gasped with pain an instant, and then said:
 "Senor, I am an under officer, and I obey orders. The man who kidnapped your sister was Captain Perdido, a Bahama buccaneer."
 "Perdido! Perdido! I once met a man of that name—he was with his mother, an old Witch, who dwelt on an island in the Gulf."
 "He is the same man."
 "Ha! then my poor sister is in the power of a merciless wretch, and Heaven have mercy on her!"
 "Captain Perdido is all that you say of him, senor; but he loves gold, and he came here to get it. Failing, he seized your sister, whom he recognized as one he had met before, and carried her off for ransom."
 "He shall have it, and his price; but how can I find him?"
 "He sent me to you, senor."
 "Ah!"
 "Yes, and we were chased off by an American cruiser, but he put me overboard, in a small boat, at night, and ordered me to pull back to the coast and see you."
 "I landed at dark, and he has sent me to my death," and the man groaned.
 "And how is it that I found you entering this vault?"
 "Senor, the man who caused Captain Perdido to come here, once lived at this house, and he knew of this treasure vault. I nursed him through an attack of fever once, and he told his secret in his delirium, and more, made known just how to enter the cellar and find that iron door. And more—he told me the secret of opening it, and I wrote it all down for future reference."
 "When Captain Perdido called for a volunteer to return and see you, I gladly offered to come, for I determined to make a bold stroke for the gold he failed to get."
 "I watched about the mansion until all was quiet, then entered the cellar, and with my lantern, found the spot where I knew there was the passage leading to the iron door."
 "After some trouble I found it, the springs worked, it opened, and you confronted me, and here I am, dying for my greed for gold."
 "As many a man has died before you; but what terms sent Captain Perdido to me for the ransom of my sister?"
 "As he expected you would find the trap open and thus secure the treasure, which he had not time to carry off, and knowing that you got a snug sum, which you found upon the pirate schooner you captured, he has struck high."
 "Name the amount of ransom."
 "Perdido the Pirate demands your sister's weight in gold!"
 "Great God! does he believe that I can raise so great a sum as that would demand?"
 "That is not all, senor."
 "Not all? What else can he demand?"
 "He demands, in addition to her weight in gold, one thousand diamonds of rare value, one thousand rubies, as many emeralds, of sapphires the same, and a like number of pearls."
 "Five thousand precious gems?"
 "Yes, senor."
 "Why, they would be far more valuable than the gold he demands."
 "Yes, senor."
 "Curses on him! No king could give such a ransom as he demands of me."
 "Those are his terms, senor."
 "And if I refuse?"
 "He gives you six months to decide, senor."

"And then?"
 "He will make your sister his bride if you fail to pay her ransom."
 Monte Cristo sprung to his feet as though an adder had stung him. He was fearfully excited, and paced the floor like a caged lion, in the effort to conceal his emotion.
 The dying man, whose strength had lasted wondrously, considering the wound he had received, tried to again speak, but his voice had gone from him.
 Monte Cristo noticed him not. He tried then to rise, but fell back, and still Monte Cristo failed to observe him.
 He stretched forth his hands appealingly, but the effort was not seen. Then he gasped for breath and moaned in anguish, as the death-rattle rose in his throat.
 A few moments of agony, while Monte Cristo paced to and fro, and the buccaneer half rose, to fall back dead.
 Still Monte Cristo walked to and fro in the little vault, his brow contracted, his face livid, lips hard set and hands clinched until the nails sunk into the flesh.
 Suddenly he stopped, and the excitement had gone from him.
 Once more he was under self-control, and approaching the body he knelt by it, and said kindly.
 "My poor fellow, I have been cruel not to think of you in your suffering, and try to soothe your dying hours. Can I do aught for you?"
 No answer came, and he laid his hand upon the upturned face.
 "Great Heaven! he is dead! I have forgotten him, in my own sorrow for poor Lita, and his lips are now sealed by death."
 "Oh! how bitter is this blow, for now it is forbidden me to know where to find that accursed pirate, Perdido."
 Again he sprung to his feet and began his rapid walk, while he muttered:
 "Dead! and his lips forever sealed."
 After a few moments he again became calm, and said sternly:
 "But she lives, and the pirate said that Perdido gave me six months in which to pay the ransom."
 "So be it; in that time I shall ransom his soul to Satan, for death shall be his portion."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE MONTE CRISTOS.
 FOR a long time Monte Cristo, for by his assumed name I must call him, remained in the gloom of the vault.
 It was certainly a most dismal place. The two lanterns seemed to shed a sickly glare, the air was heavy, almost sickening, the bones of one victim of greed for gold, lay over by the iron door, and not far away was the body of another, hardly yet grown cold.
 Standing one moment, pacing to and fro the next the living occupant of the tomb beneath the old villa, was buried in deep and painful thought.
 At length his eyes fell upon the hole in the floor of the vault, and, with a start he stepped forward and raised the lid of the iron box.
 Once more he had seen the sight that there met his gaze, but he seemed to have forgotten it, for again he started, while he said in a low tone:
 "Here alone is the ransom of a king!"
 "In Heaven's name, from whom came all this vast treasure?"
 He stood for some minutes gazing down into the iron box, the lantern held in his hand.
 It was a box three feet in length, by eighteen inches in breadth, and it seemed to be full of gold, silver and precious stones.
 There were golden trinkets innumerable, gemmed ear-rings and bracelets, finger-rings, necklaces, jeweled buckles, together with goblets, tankards and salvers of massive silver.
 Bags were here and there, amid this mass of riches, which contained gold coins, principally of Spanish manufacture.
 For a long time did Monte Cristo gaze at the treasure, turning it over with eager hand, until at last he came upon a small gold box.
 Upon the top was pasted a paper, and on it was some writing, which read as follows:
 "For the heir of the Monte Cristos."
 Opening this box, a paper was found within, and unfolding it, Monte Cristo read it carefully through.
 It was dated long years before, and at the end were the signatures of three persons.
 The paper read as follows:
 "LAND HAVEN, May —, 17—.
 "TO THE MONTE CRISTO who inherits the fortune contained in this treasure-box, greeting:
 "Whereas, Heaven having blessed me, a wicked man, and allowed me to accumulate vast riches, be it known that I bequeath these riches (contained in my iron strong box, and buried in a vault beneath the mansion which I have erected as my dwelling-place) to the one of my descendants who will devote his life to the hunting of pirates from off the high seas, despoiling wreckers and their false beacons, and doing good in the world with the gold I place at his command.
 "This fortune which I now bequeath was won by piracy!
 "I, who write these lines, held rank in the British

navy, but my evil heart sent me to ruin, and I swept the wide seas for booty.
 "I have caused only anguish in the world, to my fellow-beings.
 "I have killed, and caused to be killed, those who were innocent of doing harm to me.
 "I have sent noble ships to the bottom of the sea, and their crews with them, while their cargoes have become my booty.
 "At last, tired of my life of crime, I came here, and erected this home, building this vault in which to hide my treasure.
 "She that is my wife knows me not as I am, and I bid him who is my heir to keep my secret.
 "If he obeys not my command, according to my last will herein given, let him not touch one ounce of this gold, or a gem within the iron box, but will it to his son on the same terms that I leave the inheritance.
 "Should my heir disregard my command, and refuse to obey, then accursed be he upon the face of the earth, and accursed be every ounce of gold that he uses from this box.
 "Knowing my last will, that he, my heir, atone for my sins, by hunting outlaws from the seas, and doing good in the world with my riches, gained through piracies, I leave him my treasure, and woe be unto him if he disregard the terms of the inheritance!
 "Witness here my hand and seal."
 Here followed the seal, which was a death's-head stamped in the wax, and then the signature:

"BARICAS,
 "Lord of Castle Monte Cristo."

After this came the following:

"I, Paul Monte Cristo, being afraid of a sea life, touch not the treasure of the iron box, and therefore will it to my son, Howard Monte Cristo, to carry out the commands of my father and thereby gain the inheritance.
 PAUL MONTE CRISTO."

A third writing came after this, and read:

"I, Howard Monte Cristo, being amply provided with riches, without drawing upon the iron box of my father and grandfather, leave it to the one of my twin sons, Paul and Baricas, who will carry out the terms of the will of our ancestor, Baricas, Lord of Monte Cristo. HOWARD MONTE CRISTO,
 "Master of Land Rest Villa."

This was the last of the strange document, and the signer was the father of the twins, one of whom, Baricas, had killed the other, and became, like his great grandfather, a pirate.

With the death of Baricas, at the hand of Lita, the race had run out, and the man who assumed the name of Monte Cristo had the piratical treasure at his feet.

"Strange, passing strange," he murmured, and then added:

"So be it! I accept the command of him whose name I have taken. I take the treasure, upon the terms of the strange will, and will hunt from the seas those who brand the name of man with infamy."

"Ho, Monte Cristo the First, if your sin-branded spirit hovers about your blood-stained treasure, know that I, Monte Cristo the Last, devote my life to carrying out the terms of your will, which your own kindred shrunk from doing."

So saying, Monte Cristo closed the lid of the iron box, took up his lantern and ascended to the room above, closing the trap securely after him, as he muttered:

"That shall be the tomb of the pirate, too, for no one will ever solve the secret of the vault until this old pile is in ruins."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERIOUS BRIGANTINE.

A PRETTY brigantine sailed into the harbor of San Augustine, Florida, one pleasant afternoon about the time of the incidents related in the foregoing chapters.

No trimmer craft ever had been seen in those waters, where saucy cruisers, rakish pirate schooners and trim cutters were common, and the brigantine at once became the cynosure of all eyes.

She had been built in the Kennebec, it was said, the nursery of iron-hearted seamen and the fleetest crafts afloat, and had been brought south on a trading voyage.

After she dropped anchor hundreds stood upon the shore admiring her beauty of outline, and old heads predicted that she might sail under an honest flag, but had been intended for a black one.

In truth, it was said that she had been brought to the Gulf to dispose of to some buccaneer, who would pay a fabulous price for such a craft.

Not a gun was visible upon her decks, and there were no racks about the masts and along the bulwarks for small-arms, while to add to her peaceful look she carried only a captain, mate and seven men as a crew.

Several days passed after her arrival, and still she was an object of curiosity, and the topic of general conversation.

Her skipper was a dashing young Yankee, who smiled proudly at the praise his craft received, and passed a great deal of his time at the nearest inn, where liquors were kept.

He told marvelous stories of the speed of the brigantine, and how she had shown her heels to every sail she had met on the downward run.

She had been chased by several pirates, among them a swift, lateen-rigged craft that had run

almost upon her in the night, but she had dropped her astern after a few hours, though the outlaw craft was a very swift sailer.

In answer to what he was trading in, the skipper said he was after a cargo of fruits for the Northern cities, and had brought only a few bales of light merchandise down with him, and had readily dispose of these at Charleston, where he had touched for a short while.

One evening, after a few hours at the inn, the skipper returned to his vessel, to be soon after followed in a shore-boat by a tall man wearing a cloak and a slouch hat.

He found the skipper in his cabin, and said:

"Well, captain, as you requested, I have come off to see you."

"Yes, sir; you desired to talk business with me about the brigantine, and I thought it best to have you come here, for there are curious people ashore," answered the skipper.

"There are, indeed, sir; but I wish to say that you have the most beautiful craft I ever saw."

"She is a beauty, sir, and no mistake," was the confident answer.

"For what purpose was she built, may I ask?"

"A trader."

"Nonsense, skipper! you may tell that to the landsmen, but not to me—for I am a sailor."

"You look it, sir; and I think we have met before," and the captain looked fixedly into dark, handsome face of his visitor.

"We have, sir; and I will tell you that I know you went North with a model of this vessel, to have it built for none other than a man known as the Giant Buccaneer."

The skipper started, and his visitor smiled, while he continued:

"You were given the money to pay for the craft, and here, long after the death of the Giant Buccaneer—"

"You are sure that he is dead?" asked the skipper, in a low tone.

"Yes, he was wounded while attempting to escape, and, taking to the water, was drowned."

"Certain of that—dead sure?"

"Yes, there is not an atom of doubt of it; but, to continue my story, which proves how well I know you."

"I am a good listener, senor," was the quiet reply.

"And you'll find me a good talker, sir."

"But, as I was saying, you come into this port, two years after the death of the Giant Buccaneer, bringing the craft he ordered you to have built, and gave you more than enough money to pay for. Knowing what his orders were—"

"How know you, senor?"

"Through one of the Giant Buccaneer's men, who now serves with me."

"With you, senor?" and the skipper arched his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir, with me."

"Are you in the same trade, senor, that the Giant Buccaneer was?"

"That, sir, is none of your business; but, knowing the orders of the Buccaneer chief to you, I am aware that this craft is not as peaceable as she looks."

"How do you mean, senor?"

"Simply that she has a complete set of guns, small-arms, and equipments beneath her deck in false bulkheads, and the ornamentation on her bulwarks serves to hide her ports."

"You are certainly well informed, senor," and the skipper sneered.

"I am thoroughly informed regarding this vessel, and that is just why I am determined to have her, for a fleetier craft I never saw."

"Ah! may I ask when you ever saw her sailing qualities tested?"

"On the run out here."

"Indeed! and where were you, senor?"

"Do you remember a large, lateen-rigged craft that chased you one afternoon and evening?"

"I remember her perfectly well, and that the brigantine dropped her astern in fine style."

"She did, indeed, although that craft is one of the fleetest vessels afloat."

"Were you on the lateen-rig?"

"I was."

"She was a pirate."

"And I am a pirate!" was the blunt response.

"You, senor?" and the skipper started.

"So I said."

"Are you not afraid to so confess yourself to me?"

"Oh, no, for I know you as you are, Lieutenant De Silva—or rather *was*, for you were an officer under the Giant Buccaneer."

The skipper smiled pleasantly, and said:

"And suppose I call you Perdido, will I be far wrong?"

"No."

"You dwelt with your mother, a Witch, on an island of the Gulf where the Giant Buccaneer was your prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Escaping, he turned to piracy, and you and your mother disappeared from the island where

you dwelt, and it seems that you have turned pirate, too."

"I have."

"And your mother, the Witch?"

"Of her, sir, you need not speak; but now, as we both know each other, and I am aware that you came here to sell your vessel to the highest bidder, I now ask you her price?"

"I shall hold her high."

"What do you call high, Captain De Silva?"

"You wish to buy her?"

"I am determined to do so."

"Where is your vessel?"

"Down the coast, in hiding. I sighted you again on the run, and suspecting that you were here, came to San Augustine myself."

"With the intention of cutting the brigantine out, had I not taken the precaution to anchor right under the guns of the fort."

"Ha! ha! ha! Senor Perdido, I saved my vessel and thwarted you that time."

"Granted; but name your price for the craft."

"I wish just fifty thousand dollars for her."

"It is a shameful price, and I will not give it," angrily said Perdido.

"As you please, senor."

"You must come down in your terms."

"On the contrary, you heard but half my terms."

"Sacre! what do you mean?"

"Simply, in addition to the fifty thousand, which I wish to stow away as a nest-egg, in case of misfortune overtaking me, I am to go as captain of the brigantine."

"Furies! Do you take me for a fool, De Silva?"

"Oh, no; I only tell you my price for the vessel, and that I intend to play second fiddle to no man again."

"I have the vessel, and will go as captain, though she is your property, when you pay for her, and you can come on board with your crew and be my first officer."

"De Silva, you are a fool."

"I have been, Senor Perdido, but do not intend to be so again."

"Then keep your accursed craft, De Silva, for I will own no man my master."

Captain De Silva smiled blandly, and replied:

"As you please, Senor Perdido."

"My brigantine is for sale, but only on the terms I named."

"I will tell you what I will do."

"Well, senor."

"I will give you the fifty thousand you demand, and make you my first officer."

"No; you know my terms."

"Then I will make it sixty thousand."

"No, sir."

"A Jew gentleman to see you, sir," announced a seaman, entering the cabin at this moment, and following him came a man whose nationality no one could doubt—he was a Jew!

CHAPTER X.

THE WANDERING JEW.

THE person who so closely followed the sailor into the cabin of the mysterious brigantine was a most remarkable-looking individual.

He had come out of the vessel in a shore-boat, and his approach had not been seen until he stood by the side of the one who was in charge of the deck.

The man started at the sudden apparition, as he for an instant supposed; but before he could say anything the visitor remarked:

"Vell, mine fri'nt, I vas glat to meet mit you."

"Ho, Jew! what do you want?"

"It vas important that I vas see your captain, mine fri'nt."

"How did you get here?"

"Comed here, mine fri'nt."

"Did you swim aboard?"

"No, mine fri'nt, I vas comed out mit a boat."

The sailor glanced over the side and saw the boat, and then said:

"You move as softly as a ghost; you must be the ghost of the Wandering Jew I have heard of."

"I vas t'e Vandering Jew himself, mine fri'nt; but it vas very important that I sees your captain, right away quick."

"He has no old clothes to sell."

"I don't vas puy olt clothes just now."

"What is your business with the captain?"

"That vas just what I comed oud to tell him."

"Well, he is busy."

"And so vas I; but t'e pizziness vill not keep vot I wishes to see him for."

"I'll tell him that a Jew wishes to see him and let you know what he says."

"Thank you, my sailor mans fri'nt."

The sailor turned and went to the cabin, not seeing the Jew following close upon his heels, and when he announced his presence on deck, the strange visitor coolly glided into the cabin, to his utter amazement, for he had heard no step behind him.

De Silva, as well as Perdido, looked at the visitor in surprise, when the sailor, seeing that the Jew had entered uninvited, returned to the deck, muttering:

"That Jew moves about like a spirit, and makes me shudder to look at him."

Standing in the full glare of the cabin-lamp, the face and form of the Jew were plainly visible.

His form was tall and compact, and yet he had a slight stoop, as though years began to tell on him.

He was dressed in deep black, wore knee-breeches, silk hose and a cocked hat, while his waist-bands were fringed with fine lace.

In one hand he carried what appeared to be a shepherd's crook, painted black, and the curve being cleverly carved to represent a snake, the eyes of the reptile being diamonds.

Upon the little finger of his left hand was a ruby, and his knee and shoe-buckles were set with the same precious gems.

The man's face was also a study, and one not to be glanced at lightly, for it was strongly marked in the extreme.

The nose was prominent, and almost painfully hooked, the forehead massive, the brows heavy, and the eyes dark and full of expression, though the lids seemed to have a tendency to heaviness.

The lower part of his face was concealed by a thick white beard, worn long, for the end reached below his waist and was braided.

His hair was also white and hung in massive locks upon his shoulders, giving him, at the first glance the appearance of being a man of four-score years, when a closer look would place him at three-score.

"Well, sir, may I ask why I am honored by a visit from a gentleman who does not wait to be announced?" asked De Silva, somewhat sternly, and struck with the man's appearance.

"Mine fri'nt, I have comed to see you on important pizziness, ant ash I ish a very old mans, I sit me down," was the reply of the Jew, as he coolly took a seat, a little back from the table, but so as to be in the shadow of the lamp.

"Pardon me, I should have first asked one of your years to be seated."

"May I offer a glass of wine?"

"I thank you, mine fri'nt. I ish love t'e vine that ish red, ant vill drink me a leetle."

"Mine goot he'llt', mine fri'nt," he added, dashing off a glass of wine which the brigantine's commander poured out for him, while Perdido laughed lightly at the Jew drinking to his own health.

"You vas a pleasant gentlemen, and maybe you don't vas like mineself ant my peoples?" said the Jew, a little nettled, for he had caught the smile of Perdido's face.

"Yes, I like them when they can aid me; but I find they generally grind down the poor sailor in his bargains with them."

"T'e pirate sailor mans, yesh, for t'e ish get their monish by plood, ant t'e Jew pleeds t'em a leetle in their turn."

"You do not class me with pirates, I hope, Jew," angrily said Perdido.

"Vell, mine fri'nt, I class you mit what you ish, for I ish a man what reads a face, even if it vas t'e countenance of a Christian."

"Ha! do you dare call me a pirate?" and Perdido sprung to his feet, his hand in his breast upon a knife-hilt.

"Mine fri'nt, it vas given me to know just vat you vas all t'e time, and that your mother vas a Vitcher vomans."

"I am a fool to parley with you, for I know now that we have had dealings together; doubtless I sold you booty at some time or other, though I do not recall your face," and Perdido resumed his seat, greatly to the regret of De Silva, who was curious to know why the Jew had called upon him, and wished his first visitor to get out of the way.

But Perdido had the same curiosity, for something about the Jew impressed him strangely, and he determined to remain.

Seeing this, and feeling that he already had Perdido in his power, as much as he, Perdido, had him, the skipper said:

"Well, senor, what is the nature of your business with me?"

"I vas vant to puy von vessel, mine fri'nt."

"What kind of a vessel?"

"Von like t'e prigantine here."

"Ah! for trading, I suppose?" said the skipper, wondering what the Jew could want with a vessel, while Perdido remarked, with a sneer:

"No, for pirating, I guess, and the Jew will go as captain, so as to get all the booty without having to buy it from the sea rovers."

"Vell, that would pe a very goot vay, too; but I wants a vessel, an' vas villin' to pay for it."

"A Jew willing to pay a good sum?" again sneered Perdido.

"Yes, mine fri'nt, a Jew vill get vat he wants, cost vat it vill; but vill you sell t'e prigantine, mine fri'nt?"

"Yes, she is for sale."

"At what sum, mine fri'nt?"

"I just offered her to that gentleman for fifty thousand dollars."

"It is a very pig sum of monish, mine fri'nt, put I vill take t'e prigantine at t'e fifty t'ousand tollars," was the cool reply.

Perdido and De Silva were both astonished, and the former said with a rude laugh:

"Why, he hasn't one-fifth the sum, De Silva."
 "I have what will bring the money, here, mine friend," and he took out a bag filled with precious gems, and laid it upon the table before De Silva.

Surprised at this, Perdido said angrily:

"The brigantine is sold, Jew, for I bought her."

"At my terms, senor?" asked the skipper.

"Sixty thousand and you my first, is my offer."

"I will not accept it," firmly answered De Silva.

"I will give the sixty thousand, too, mine friend," added the Jew.

"Then, by Heaven! I make it seventy-five thousand, De Silva," cried Perdido.

"With me as captain, senor?"

"No, as first officer."

"I will not take it, senor."

"I make it one hundred thousand dollars, mine friend," calmly said the Jew.

"Ha! ha! Senor Perdido, will you come to that figure?" laughed De Silva.

"Yes, with you as first officer."

"I will not take other terms, no matter what the sum paid, unless I hold my rank as captain of the brigantine," firmly declared De Silva.

"Ah! that was the matter with the pizzeness, was it? Well, mine friend, I was wanting a captain for the brigantine, and I give the hundred thousand and make you the commander."

"There, Perdido, will you equal that?"

Perdido saw the brigantine about to slip out of his grasp, through the Jew's last offer.

He was more anxious to possess the craft than any vessel afloat, and he was determined to get her at any price he could command.

The coffers of his vessel could turn out for him gold and booty equal the sum offered, and with the brigantine, he did not doubt but that he could soon replenish them.

So he argued, as he mused:

"The ransom I get for that girl will more than return the sum. I do not like the promising De Silva the captaincy, but my men I can trust, and I will end his career the day I sail in the brigantine."

Turning to the skipper, he said:

"De Silva, I give the one hundred thousand for the brigantine, and you to rank as captain, but to be second in command to me—is that the understanding?"

"Those are my terms, senor."

"Then, Jew, the brigantine is mine."

"Mine friend, don't you was pe in such a hurry, for dis was a leetle pizzeness dat was not done yet. You was offer the hundred thousand dollars, don't it?"

"Yes."

"Ant the gentlemen here the rank of the captain with the brigantines?"

"Yes, such was my offer, and he has accepted my terms," impatiently said Perdido.

"I don't was hear him say noddings about accepting the terms. Was you, mine friend?"

"No, the brigantine is still my property, for as yet I have closed with no offer for her."

"Den I makes you an offer pretty quick, mine friend, for—"

"Hold, Jew! if you offer one *onza* above what I have done, I will kill you as I would a dog!" cried Perdido, white with rage, as he sprung to his feet and leveled a pistol full at the heart of the Jew.

But the man who had told the sailor that he was the Wandering Jew, did not quail or seem in the least degree excited. In fact, he appeared utterly indifferent, as he turned to the skipper of the coveted craft and said in distinct, low tones:

"Mine friend, I make you the offer for the beautiful brigantine, the rank of captain for her, and the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

CHAPTER XI.

FOILED.

To say that both Perdido, the Pirate, and De Silva, the brigantine's skipper, were astounded by the offer of the Jew for the craft, would not express it; for, while the latter sprung to his feet in his amazement, the former gazed upon him with the air of a man suddenly dazed, and forgot to carry out his threat.

Still holding his pistol in his hand, he did not make the slightest effort to use it, and only seemed to recover himself when the Jew, with an agility not to be expected from one of his gray locks, suddenly sprung forward and seized the weapon.

This brought Perdido to his senses, and he cried savagely:

"How! Jew, do you dare attack me?"

"You was threaten to kill me, mine friend, and I don't was want to die," was the imperturbable answer, as the weapon was wrenched from the hand of the astonished pirate captain, and coolly tossed upon the table.

With a cry of rage the pirate now sprung upon his adversary, for such he had now become, and an uplifted knife was in his hand.

The Jew had turned away, but a cry of warning from De Silva placed him upon his guard, and he saw the pirate almost upon him.

Many men, in fact most men, would have fled before such an unequal conflict, at least until they could get on more equal terms; but not so the Jew, for he turned upon his foe, who cried:

"I will have your heart's blood, Jew!"

"You was mistaken, mine friend," was the calm response, and the uplifted hand of the pirate was seized in an iron grip, the arm bent back with irresistible force, and Perdido had a cry of anguish forced from his lips, while he dropped the knife to the floor.

The moment that he let go the knife, the Jew released him and walked across the cabin.

But Perdido was white with rage and desperate, so, seizing a sword that hung near at hand, he again sprung toward the Jew.

De Silva had observed with utter amazement the marvelous strength of the old Jew, and at first had intended to interfere and protect him, until he saw that Perdido was no match for him, so he allowed them to settle it in their own way.

But now, when he beheld Perdido armed with a sword, he knew that the contest was wholly unequal, and he sprung before the infuriated pirate, crying:

"Hold, Perdido! That man is in my cabin as a guest, and you shall not cut him down."

"Mine friend, dere was two weapon dot I sees mit the wall of the cabins, ant I will get me von ant let the gentlemen have his fun," and the Jew seized one of the swords that were the only arms visible on board the peaceful-looking brigantine.

"But can you use a sword?" asked De Silva, still standing before the pirate captain.

"I was use von ven I was a young man, mine friend," and he raised the blade on guard.

Seeing it, Perdido suddenly dashed De Silva to one side, and the two blades crossed, the pirate shouting:

"Now, Jew, it is a battle to the death!"

"It will be the Christian, ant not the Jew, that dies, mine friend, for I has pizzeness to look after."

"By Heaven! but I half believe you, Jew, from the way you wield a sword."

"Be careful, Perdido, or, old as he is, he will stain my pretty cabin up with your blood!" warned De Silva, while the unwonted sound of clashing blades and loud voices in the cabin brought the crew of the brigantine to the companionway, where they stood, deeply interested lookers-on at the strange combat.

Perdido, foiled in his attempt to shoot the Jew, and a second time in his effort to drive a knife into his heart, felt that with blades he would have his own way, for the old Jew could not certainly be a swordsman.

But half a dozen passes, and he had reason to change his mind.

Perdido was a skilled swordsman, and prided himself upon it.

Aboard ship he made his officers and men fence with him, to keep him in practice; but now, although he used his greatest skill, he could neither disarm or harm the Jew.

Gladly would he have driven the blade to the Jew's heart, if he could; but that he found impossible, for his every effort was cleverly foiled.

Maddened, he pressed the fight harder and hotter; yet it was all the same to the Jew, who was cool and smiling, and acted wholly on the defensive.

"This must stop! It has gone far enough!" suddenly cried De Silva, fearing that Perdido might kill the Jew by some lucky thrust, and remembering the very remarkable offer the latter had made him for his vessel.

"Vell, mine friend, I will stop the pizzeness pretty quick, ven you says so."

"I do say so."

"Vell, mine pirate friend, you was disarmt."

As he spoke the Jew changed, with lightning-like rapidity, to the offensive, and in an instant the blade of the pirate was skillfully caught by the other and, twisted from his grasp, went flying across the cabin, to stick quivering in the side.

"Bravo!" shouted De Silva, while the crew, in spite of themselves, broke forth in a cheer.

"The pizzeness has ended, mine friend," smilingly said the Jew, and he turned to De Silva.

As for Perdido, he seemed as though about to again spring upon his victor, and seeing it, the Jew turned upon him, drew himself up proudly, and said in a deep, stern voice:

"Sir Pirate, I have the pleasure of sparing your lives three times; put if you was to attack me once more, I will send you to your devils pretty quick, sure!"

It would have been laughable, under other circumstances, the way the Jew spoke, but now it was impressive, and his stern manner and flashing eyes completely cowed Perdido.

Making no reply to him, and smothering his emotions and rage at his defeat, he turned to De Silva and said:

"Do you accept my offer for the brigantine?"

"Senor Jew, do you mean your offer in good faith?" demanded De Silva, turning to the Jew.

"I was mean it, mine friend, and will pay you the money pretty quick," and he again took out his purse of gems.

De Silva had been an ocean highwayman long

enough to know pure jewels and a glance at them as the Jew poured them again upon the table, told him there was double the price offered for the vessel there, so he said:

"The brigantine is sold, Senor Perdido."

"So be it, De Silva; you have been treacherous to me, and I'll not forget it," was the savage response of the disappointed pirate, as he strode toward the companionway.

Before De Silva could utter a word in response, the Jew had wheeled upon the speaker, and grasping him by both shoulders, he said, in a voice that was hoarse and threatening:

"Mine pirate friend, if you was say von vord to the law peeples about dis pizzeness, or to harm dis brigantine, I will have you hung mit a rope, so helps me the God of Abraham!"

In spite of the broken English, the really funny dialect, the words were impressive, and Perdido quailed beneath them, and muttered:

"I meant no harm to the vessel—"

"Or the captain."

"Or to De Silva; I only said that I would not forget him, and I will not, if ever it comes in my way to befriend him."

"Vell, maybe he don't was want your friendship; put don't you be von fool ant get your neck into von rope, for your mother, the Vitcher vomans will be sorry for her son. You was understands me, mine friend?"

Whether he did or not, Perdido was cowed, and with a muttered oath he started to leave the vessel; but the Jew said:

"Vait, mine friend, and we was go mit each other."

"Here, mine friend, you was see me count the gems."

One by one he counted out the stones, calling the value of each, as De Silva marked it down, until the sum was reached, and many more yet remained in the purse.

"Now, mine friend, this beautiful brigantine was mine, don't it?"

"It is, and I will give you a bill of sale of it."

"And you was her captains."

"Yes; if so you desire it."

"I do, mine friend; put now let us drink some pottles of wine, and don't be pad friend some more, for you maybe one day will want some helps from the old Wandering Jew."

The last words were addressed to Perdido, who smoothed his ruffled temper and sat down at the table once more; but there was treachery in his eyes, in spite of his pretended reconciliation, and the Jew alone was not the object of his hatred.

Half an hour after Perdido and the Jew left the brigantine together, De Silva whispering in the ear of the latter:

"Beware of that man!"

"I was acquainted with him, mine friend," was the low response, and soon after the two landed.

"Where are you stopping, Jew?" asked the pirate in an off-hand way.

"I was put up at the inn; goot-night, ant if you wants to see me, just come ant ask for Jacob, the Wandering Jew."

"I will; goot-night."

And Perdido turned away up the street, while the Jew moved slowly in the direction of the inn.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSIN.

The Jew had not gone far from the spot where he had parted with Perdido, when he came upon two men strolling leisurely along the shore and apparently enjoying the balmy breeze that came off from the water.

He stopped and spoke a few words with them in a low tone, and then walked on toward the inn, while the two men hastened on after the pirate, who was disappearing from view up the street.

Reaching the inn, the Jew entered by a private door, and bade a servant summon the landlord.

"I want a room, mine friend, and a pleasant von, and here ish the money to pay mit it," he said, handing the landlord a liberal supply of gold.

At first mine host had not been pleasantly impressed with his visitor; but the gold given was so remarkably liberal that he at once became most polite.

"You shall have the best room in the house, sir; and is there anything else that I can do for you?" he said, with the air of one who could be a slave for gold but a tyrant to the poor.

"Yes, mine friend, you will tell von leetle lie for me."

The landlord raised his eyebrows as though he could not tell a lie, and they drooped quickly when a golden eagle was slipped into his hand, and the Jew said:

"You will order to my rooms von nice suppers, mit a pottle of your very best vines and a bundle of cigars; then, ven any von comes and asks mit you was the Wandering Jew here, you tell him yes, and he has been mit you for several days. You understand, mine friend?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"And you will say that I was going to remain for some times?"

"Yes, senor."

"Now I will go mit my room, and don't you forget t'e suppers."

"No, senor; all shall be to your taste," and the landlord led the way to what was certainly a most pleasant room, overlooking the water.

The Jew expressed himself as well pleased, and after partaking of a substantial supper, which would have given a younger man the nightmare, he turned down his lamp and retired for the night for it was growing late.

A man stood outside of the inn at the time, and saw the darkening of the room.

Then he crossed and entered the inn.

One glance into his face, as he entered the lighted tap room, and Perdido was recognized.

"Landlord, have you an old Jew stopping here with you?" he asked, after ordering a bottle of "the best."

"Yes, senor."

"Do you know his name?"

"He calls himself simply the Wandering Jew, senor."

"Has he been long with you?"

"Some days, senor."

"And will remain how long, did he say?"

"Some weeks."

Perdido was silent a moment, and then said:

"I am a Government officer, landlord, on secret service but do not wish it known."

"Yes, senor."

"Any information you can give me about the Jew will be kindly received, and I have gold to pay for it."

"I will willingly give a Government officer all the information I can, senor."

"What would the senor know?"

"The Jew is rich?"

"He spends money most lavishly, senor."

"Do you know from whence he came?"

"No, senor."

"Nor aught about him?"

"Not a word, senor."

"Well, he may not be the man I seek, and again he may be; I will discover to-morrow. In the mean time I will take a room with you."

"Yes, senor; I can give you a good room upstairs and next to the one occupied by my Jewish guest."

"I will take it," and after inviting the landlord to finish another bottle with him, Perdido went to his room.

But it was not to sleep.

He sat by the open window, gazing out upon the water, with the vessels at anchor, until all was as still as death in the inn.

Then he went out in the corridor and listened at the door, which the landlord had told him led into the Jew's room.

All seemed quiet within, except the loud breathing of a person in deep slumber.

Trying the door, he found it, to his surprise, unlocked, and muttered:

"The Jew is rash, and it will cost him his life."

Then he returned to his own room once more, and, as if nerving himself to some desperate task, took a glass of liquor, from a decanter the landlord had brought with him.

Then he drew a long-bladed knife from his breast-pocket, and coolly examined the point and blade.

It seemed to suit him, and he then again went out into the hall.

Cautiously he approached the door of the Jew's room, raised the latch and entered.

Low breathing came from the form he saw muffled up in the bed.

The lamp was turned low, but there was light enough for his purpose.

Noiselessly he closed the door, and with stealthy step went toward the bed.

The intended victim did not move, or awaken.

The breathing remained steady, and Perdido stepped nearer and raised his hand, the arm bared for the deadly blow.

An instant he stood thus, measuring the chances of instant death, and selecting the spot where to drive the long, keen blade.

Then the weapon fell with a sudden thud, and at the same time, two hands were thrust out from beneath the bed, and seizing the legs of the pirate, he was thrown heavily to the floor.

The fall almost stunned him, and before he could rise, the Jew was upon him, his hands were pinioned, and a gag was thrust into his mouth.

Perdido saw that it was his intended victim that had conquered, and he looked mutely toward the bed.

The Jew saw the look, and said:

"Mine fri'nt, I have been much of a traveler, and I was not put faith in pirates, so I was know that you vants my jewels and my lifes."

"You see I was make up a sham Jew for t'e ped, and I was git myself unter t'e ped, and here I ish, ant dere was you."

"Vell, I must go away mit myself, so I pids you fare me well."

With this the Jew picked up his traps and noiselessly left the room, leaving his victim bound and gagged.

As he let himself out of the door, a man came toward him.

It was one of the two whom he had met on the shore, after leaving the brigantine.

"Vell?" he said, abruptly.

"The lateen-rigged craft lies in a bayou some leagues from here, senor, so Mateo found out, and he has gone there to discover her, and will await you at the old fort."

"Vell, I will pe dere; but you vait in town to get vat news you ish aple."

"Yes, senor," answered the man, as the Jew, without another word, walked away down the street.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PADRE'S POWER.

In a snug hiding-place, not very far from the harbor, in which lay the pretty brigantine, which the Jew had purchased, lay at anchor, the same long, low, lateen-rigged craft which the reader saw run into the little harbor of Villa Haven, upon the Atlantic coast, and steal from the quiet old home the fair young mistress.

The craft was half hidden by the trees along the shore, for she lay against the bank, and some of her crew were on deck, and others ashore, none of them seeming to dread any danger.

They were a hard-looking set, mostly Spaniards, Mexicans and Portuguese, and passed their time in idly sleeping or playing cards.

"Ho, senors, a padre!" suddenly cried one of their number, springing to his feet as a padre suddenly rode into view, coming down the point of land that formed one bank of the bayou in which the vessel was hiding.

All arose with evident respect, for to them a padre was a sacred personage, and eyed him as he rode up and came to a halt.

He was a man of fine presence, a bold, fine face, and was clad in the garb of his order.

He was well mounted, rode with ease and grace, and in deep, but pleasant tones, said:

"I salute you, my children."

The wild and reckless crew thanked him, and crowded about him for his blessing, which he unhesitatingly gave, and then said:

"My children, I know just who and what you are, and I have come to save you."

They looked at him in amazement, and he continued:

"Yes, to save your necks from the gallows, for even now a vessel-of-war is in sight off this inlet, and by nightfall but for me, you would all be in irons beneath her deck."

"Your commander, Captain Perdido, I met in the town, and the message that came for your other officers to join him there, was sent by me, to get them away from here, for I knew they would attempt to put to sea in the very face of the cruiser, and meet with capture and death."

"How many of you are there here?"

"Two-score and ten, holy padre," answered the boatswain.

"Well, I have it in my power to offer you a berth in a good service that will pay you well."

"Who will accept my offer and go with me?"

To a man almost they answered in the affirmative, and the padre continued:

"Though you have gone wrong, my children, and lived sinful lives, I know that you have respect for your church and one of its priests, and I would not see harm befall you which I can ward off, and I promise you a good berth, on a crack vessel and good pay."

"Will you be afther taking to the sea yersilf, yer holy riverence?" asked an Irishman.

"No; but I have a friend who has a fine vessel, and it is his intention to cruise the world over for his pleasure, and it is with him that I will get you a berth."

"Now, to prove that I mean you well, I will go on board your vessel, and in a short while will divide the treasure there among you."

A wild shout greeted these words, and the reckless crew crossed themselves and saluted the padre reverently as he went by them and sprung lightly on board the vessel.

As he reached the deck he turned and said:

"My children, get your boats in readiness to depart, and take your kits with you."

With this he walked toward the cabin, taking a bunch of keys from a pocket in his robe.

As he entered the cabin the men stood grouped together watching him, and discussing his strange coming into their midst.

There were several from the town among them, and these knew him, and told their messmates that he had come to San Augustine a rich Spaniard, and purchased a grand old house there.

But soon after he had turned his mansion into a monastery, and put on a padre's robes, while he gave his money generously to the church and the poor.

While they were discussing him the padre entered the cabin, and there he halted, for he heard the sound of weeping.

It was a low sobbing, and in a woman's voice.

"Ha! Captain Perdido has some fair captive on board of his vessel."

"I will see who she is."

And he stepped to the little state-room door and rapped.

The sobbing ceased, and a voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"A priest, daughter, and one who would serve you," was the answer.

The one within said:

"I am in irons, and bound to the floor; you will have to come in, for I cannot open the door."

He opened the door and stepped within, to fairly start as he gazed upon the occupant of the state-room.

It was Lita, the beautiful girl who had been stolen from Villa Haven.

Her face was pale, yet still most beautiful, and her eyes were filled with tears.

About each wrist was an iron band, and these were attached to chains, fastened to the floor.

"My poor child, what means this outrage?" asked the padre kindly.

"It means, holy father, that I was kidnapped from my home in the Carolinas, and brought here by Perdido, the Pirate, who now holds me for ransom, he says."

"And is this the way he treats you?" indignantly asked the padre.

"Until yesterday I was treated with respect; but then the pirate chief had to go away on business, he said, and ran into an inlet and departed, after first putting me in irons, as you see, to prevent my escape."

"I have offered an old negress, who acts as my keeper, a large sum to release me, but she is deaf to my entreaties."

"But how is it that you, a priest, are on board a pirate vessel, and where is Captain Perdido?"

"He is up in the town, and so are his officers, lady, and I have come here to save his men, for his vessel is to be seized, and I do not wish them to suffer; but let me see if I cannot find the keys to your irons, so that I can set you free."

"Thank God! at last! at last!" cried Lita, as the priest left the state-room.

Again in the cabin, he took the bunch of keys from his pocket, and carefully examined them.

"Yes, this key will unlock her irons, and these will unlock the pirate's strong-box."

He took the latter key, stooped, and raised a trap in the flooring.

Beneath was an iron box, and into this he fitted the key.

It opened readily, and a fine display of treasures was before the padre's eyes.

Bending over he selected a number of precious stones from the collection, emptied a bag of gold into a receptacle in his robe, and then stepping up the companionway called to two of the crew:

"Take this box on deck," he said.

"In high glee they obeyed, for they were aware of what were its contents."

"Come, my children, let me divide the spoil among you, for I have taken my share to give to the poor," he said.

Instantly they gathered eagerly about him, and the contents of the treasure-box of Captain Perdido were distributed among his pirate crew.

"Now, to your boats, and I will soon join you with a poor captive your captain has on board."

"There's a big ransom due on the lady, holy father," said one of the crew.

"My son, the lady will accompany you and be left in good hands."

"Now take the gig in tow for me to return in, for I go back by land."

Again the padre entered the cabin, and the irons were quickly unlocked from the fair wrists they encircled.

"Come, my daughter, for you will go from here."

"God bless you," murmured Lita, as she followed the padre to the deck.

Then he aided her into a boat, and the men being at their oars pulled away, the gig towing behind.

A pull of a mile and suddenly a vessel came in sight.

Instantly the men ceased rowing, for they were yet in the mouth of the bayou, while the strange craft was in open water, half a mile distant.

"The brigantine! the brigantine!" cried a score of voices, recognizing the vessel they had chased in their run southward.

"Yes, it is the vessel on which you will have a berth."

"Resume your oars and pull for her, for, see, she signals!"

The men obeyed, for though they were acting in the dark, as it were, the mysterious padre seemed to exert some strange influence over them, and govern them wholly with his will.

They trusted him because he was a padre, and he having divided their captain's treasure among them, they felt that he had so far proven himself their friend.

Once more they resumed rowing, and in a short while the brigantine luffed up and lay to, while her beauty of outline won loud praises from the pirates.

Upon the deck stood the skipper, De Silva, and his small crew were all that were visible on board.

Going over the side the padre was met by De Silva who said, in his brusque way:

"Senor Padre, I was sent here to meet some boats commanded by a priest."

"I suppose you are the one I was directed to?"

"From whom do you come, my son?"

"The Wandering Jew of the sea."

"Yes, I am the one you seek, and your crew are in the boats alongside, as you see."

"Were you ordered to return to your anchorage off the town?"

"I was, Senor Padre."

"Then you can call your crew on board, and, my son, kindly take charge of a fair girl, the pirate Perdido's captive, and keep her on board until the Wandering Jew decides what is to be done for her."

"Yes, Senor Padre, I will do so, and I expect to see the Jew upon my return; but will you pardon me, senor, if I ask what a Jew and a priest can have in common together?"

"My son, the tie of humanity."

"I am his friend, and he is mine."

"I owe him my life, and I can forget him only with my dying breath."

The padre spoke impressively, and then turning, aided Lita to the deck, presenting her to the captain of the brigantine.

Bidding Lita farewell, and with a word of adieu to De Silva and the crew, the padre turned to the small boat, the others were set adrift, and seizing the oars he pulled with a strong stroke back to the mouth of the bayou, while the brigantine set sail up the coast on her return to San Augustine.

Up the bayou pulled the padre, with his strong, steady stroke, and soon ran alongside of the deserted pirate vessel.

Once again he entered the cabin, to suddenly start back, for a human being confronted him.

It was the negress of whom Lita had spoken, who had been asleep in a cosy nook, and not one had thought of her.

She was a large, masculine-looking woman, cruel-faced, and the terror of even that pirate crew, when aroused.

She claimed to be able to cast spells upon one, wore a necklace of human teeth, and dressed in fiery red.

She had awakened to find her captive, whom she had been left to guard, gone from the state-room, and rushing through the vessel, she had found it deserted.

The opened trap in the cabin floor proved that the strong box had been rifled, and she stood in utter dismay, gazing about her, when suddenly she came face to face with the padre.

She had drawn a long knife when she heard the padre's step, and upon his entering the cabin she uttered a wild cry, more like the shriek of a wild beast than a human being, and sprung toward him.

But the padre was too quick for her; his right arm shot forth suddenly, the crack of a pistol followed, and full length upon her face fell the Black Witch of the Sea, as the crew had called her.

An instant, while he coolly reloaded his weapon, the padre gazed upon her, and then stepping across her body, left the cabin and the vessel.

Mounting his patiently-waiting horse, he rode away in the gloom of approaching night.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

AGAIN was the pretty brigantine at anchor in the harbor of San Augustine.

Her departure to sea at dawn had been noticed and commented upon; but after twenty-four hours' absence, she had run back to her old anchorage.

She presented no change in appearance, the same crew only were visible upon her decks, and her skipper, as usual, repaired to the inn for his bottle of wine and dinner ashore.

In answer to why he had gone to sea, he said: "Merely to keep the craft from getting rusty, and give the boys a sail."

Several merchants called upon the skipper, and made good offers for her, wishing just such a fleet craft for their service.

But De Silva smiled and replied:

"Gentlemen, there is no craft like that brigantine afloat, and I know it."

"She was built from models furnished by a man whose life depended upon the speed of a vessel."

"He first tried those models with a rowboat, and found that it sat well on the water, and was easily pushed through it."

"Then he had a sailboat built upon the same plan, and it went like a flying-fish, and was as stiff as a coaster in a blow."

"Next he built a sloop, and she showed her heels to everything near her tonnage."

"Then that brigantine was built upon the same model, and the result is what you see her."

"Who was her builder?" asked one.

"I had her built in the Kennebec, and I saw every timber that went into her."

"Her projector was a man who lost his life in these waters, and, as I said, knew what a craft should be."

"And who was that, skipper?" queried one of the merchants.

"He was known as the Giant Buccaneer, and also as the Sea Monster, senors."

The merchants started and looked at each other.

Then they gazed at the skipper, and one asked:

"Do you know him?"

"I was his prisoner, senors, and I saw his

trials with his models, and determined to have them.

"Opportunity offering, I kidnapped the models, and, making my escape, took them with me, and the result is the brigantine, and after all I suffered, you do not wonder that I want a big price for the craft?"

"Oh no, and we are willing to pay well."

"Say twenty thousand dollars."

The skipper smiled and answered:

"Senors, if I wished to do an act of dishonor, and sell my craft to pirates, I could get for her easily double that sum; but of course I would not do this."

"I have, however, an offer of thirty thousand for her now."

"As much as that?"

"Yes, senors, and in hard cash."

"Well, we need the vessel very much, and will give you thirty-one thousand dollars for her," and the merchants looked as though the brigantine already belonged to them.

"Senors, I will not take anything like that sum for her."

"Then we cannot trade, sir?"

"No, but we can have a bottle of wine," said De Silva, pleasantly, and after discussing it, the merchants departed, greatly disappointed at their failure.

As the merchants left the inn, a party of young naval officers entered and took a seat at a table near the skipper, while they began discussing with an official of the town an affair of considerable importance.

"So you have captured that lateen craft known as the Sea Thief, that has done so much damage of late in Cuban waters," said the town official, who had joined the party at the door.

"Yes, Don Real, we captured the craft, but not her commander or crew," answered a handsome young officer of twenty-five.

"How was that, Captain Herbert?" queried Don Real.

"I will tell you, sir."

"We had not been long in port when a padre boarded us, and asked for an interview with me."

"He was a man of striking appearance, had the eye and voice of a sailor, rather than a priest, and was as courteous as a cavalier."

"He introduced himself to me as Father Infelix, and he is the same man who was known as Don Ramon, and lived in such princely style in his villa, which he afterward turned into a monastery, while he took orders, or resumed his garb of a priest, having, I have heard, been educated in early life for the church."

"Yes, I know him, Captain Herbert, and he has done much good."

"What his past life was no one knows, or knowing, will tell; but he has doubtless been very wild, and is now seeking to atone for his sins, if he has been guilty of any."

"And it was Father Infelix then, that visited you in regard to the pirate craft?"

"Yes, Don Real, and he told me that he had it in his power to turn over the craft into my hands."

"He said he had just visited the proper officials, but could get no force to send, and then, I coming into port with my schooner, he had come to me."

"I asked him how he knew about the pirate being in hiding down the coast, and he said that was a secret which he could not divulge."

"Furthermore, he led me to believe that some of the officers had sought him, to make confession, and get absolution for their sins,* and he had determined to do what good he could by depriving them of their vessel."

"Those who came to him he in some way, it seems, got to remain away from their craft, while he went down to where she was anchored and told the men to desert, to save their necks, as a cruiser was then in pursuit of them."

"It seems that they were influenced by him, and departed from the craft, leaving her at anchor in the bayou, and thus we found her."

"An iron strong-box had been rifled of its contents, and lay open upon the deck, and there were blood-stains upon the cabin floor, as though some tragedy had been enacted there, and I judged the crew had robbed the schooner, and perhaps killed some captives, for iron manacles, bolted to the floor, were in a small state-room."

"So the craft was deserted, Senor Captain?"

"Wholly so, Don Real; but still was a most valuable capture, for she is a very fleet craft, as I know, having chased her, and her guns and equipment are in perfect condition."

"Well, senor, it was a bloodless victory, and you are to be congratulated; but did Father Infelix accompany you?"

"No, he merely told me where I would find the Sea Thief at anchor."

"And gave you no clew to the whereabouts of her crew?"

"None, senor."

"Then we must keep a bright lookout, for they will doubtless scatter to the Gulf ports,

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*It is a well-known fact that Spanish pirates were wont to go regularly to priests of their church to confess their sins and receive absolution.—THE AUTHOR.

and some of them come here, while they may attempt to cut out their craft, as Perdido, the pirate, is as cunning as a fox, and a bold devil, too."

"I will be on the watch for them, Don Real, for we will be in port some days," answered the young American officer, and having, with his comrades and the Don, discussed several bottles of wine, they arose to go, when a city messenger entered hastily.

"What is it, Carlos?" asked Don Real.

"I have to report, senor, that the Padre Infelix has disappeared most mysteriously from the Ramon Monastery, and the fathers are fearful that harm has befallen him."

He has not been seen since last evening before sunset, when he walked into the forest alone, as was his wont.

"His rooms are as he left them, and it is feared by the fathers that he has been murdered."

The Don and the American officer glanced at each other, and the former said:

"I fear it is as they believe, Carlos," and he added, addressing Captain Herbert:

"Senor, the men have evidently suspected that they were betrayed by the padre, and they have killed him."

"This proves that they are in our town, so I will do what I can to ferret out their hiding-place, and solve the mystery of the missing padre."

"And I will aid you all in my power, Don Real," answered the young American captain, and the party left the inn together, De Silva, half nodding over his bottle of wine at a table near, having heard all that had been said.

As he was about to depart, the landlord entered, accompanied by a most distinguished-looking personage, although a man very young in years.

The new-comer was handsomely attired in sailor costume, and glanced about the room with an eagle eye as he entered.

"That, senor, is the skipper and owner of the brigantine," said the landlord, addressing the stranger, and pointing to De Silva.

"Thank you, senor, said the stranger, in a courtly way, and he walked over to where the skipper sat, and said, politely:

"Captain De Silva, I presume?"

"At your service, senor," and the skipper arose and gazed with admiration upon the tall, remarkably handsome man who confronted him.

"My name is Monte Cristo, senor, and I have sought you to purchase your brigantine of you, so kindly name her price, for I confess frankly that I must have her at any cost."

CHAPTER XV.

MONTE CRISTO'S CRUISE.

I WILL now return to the young master of Villa Haven, who so strangely assumed the name of Monte Cristo.

Having read the remarkable will of the one who had been the pirate, and the lines written by the inheritors of the vast treasure, he decided to carry out the wishes of the old outlaw according to the terms of inheritance.

The morning found him agreed upon his plans, and arrangements were made for closing up the mansion and leaving the slaves under competent management.

The boats were hauled out of the harbor and laid up, the gates leading into the grounds were fastened securely, and the villa, from cellar to attic, was locked and barred.

Then the yacht belonging to the young master was manned with a new and competent crew of twenty men, and having taken his luggage on board, and bidden farewell to his faithful slaves, Monte Cristo set sail from Villa Haven, determined to hunt down those who had kidnapped his idolized sister, and also take measures to carry out the terms of the inheritance he had found in the secret vault.

Upon looking over this he had found it of vast value, and he was absolutely astonished at the riches he had thus gained.

The life of the young man had been a strange one, and one of bitter memories in later years.

A happy home, loving parents, and a darling sister had blessed his early boyhood; but a man whom his father had called his friend had robbed them of their riches, taken that father's life, stolen his little sister, broken his mother's heart, and sent him a wanderer through the world.

His wanderings he had turned into a search for his sister, and at last, stung to seek revenge, he had sought service in the employ of the man who had so wronged him, and who was a money-lender in New Orleans.

Watching his chance, and unable, as he had hoped, to trace his sister, he had one day, when the money-lender was in his money vault, closed the trap upon him, and, as he believed, left him to die.

From that moment his fortune had changed, for chance threw it in his way, after flying from the house of the money-lender, to gain possession of a pirate craft that belonged to the Giant Buccaneer.

Turning his capture to good advantage, he had cruised about in Southern waters, until he at last found his sister the pretended child of a

wrecker and his wife, who were known as the Water Wolves of the Bahamas.

Fearing prosecution for having, as he believed, taken the life of the money-lender, and wishing to take his sister forever away from the scenes, where she had known so much of crime and sorrow among the wreckers, he had purchased the old house of the Monte Cristo, in the hope that there they would live in joy and peace, for he had found upon the schooner of the Giant Buccaneer a large fortune, which he did not hesitate to appropriate to his own uses, and at the same time do all the good that it was in his power to do with money.

But the reader has seen his dream of happiness rudely broken, and yet, in his sorrow for the loss of his sister, his good fortune did not desert him, for he found the inheritance in the secret vault.

Far greater in value were the contents of the iron box in the vault than had been the treasure found upon the pirate schooner, and he felt that he was indeed a rich man, and had means at his command to carry out the terms of the will of old Monte Cristo, and also prosecute fully the search for his sister.

His treasure he carried on board the yacht with him, and then started upon a cruise to find the vessel-of-war which had chased Perdido the Pirate to sea.

By inquiries from coasting vessels he soon learned what cruiser it was, and her whereabouts, and a few days' search found her coming out of Charleston.

He signaled her, and asking that he might go on board, the permission was granted and he boarded the cruiser and sought an interview with her commander.

To him he told the story of his sister's capture, and got a description of the cruiser's chase of the pirate.

Also he received a correct description of the lateen-rigged craft, after which he returned on board his yacht and set sail southward.

Every port along the coast was visited, and all the vessels therein carefully looked over, in the hope of finding one for his purpose.

But though he saw a number of trim and fleet crafts, none of them seemed to strike his seaman's eye as just the one for his purpose.

At last upon reaching far Southern waters, the lookout on the yacht sighted a vessel just coming out of an inlet on the coast.

The yacht had been sailing along close inshore, and hardly had the strange sail been sighted, not a mile distant, when all on board the little craft expressed their admiration at her beauty of outline.

Then, as she sailed swiftly away, dropping the fleet yacht readily, they became enthusiastic over her fleetness, and Monte Cristo, who was in his cabin, was called on deck to see how his pretty craft was being worsted in a trial of speed.

Monte Cristo was astounded.

He knew that few vessels could lead his yacht, and what was more, the wind, though very light, was driving the large stranger more swiftly through the water than it was his craft.

He at once spread the yacht with all the canvas that would draw, and still the stranger without adding a sail held her own splendidly.

"That is the craft we want, lads, and which I will have," he said, firmly, and then gave orders to keep the stranger in sight, if possible, and follow her into port, if she sought one.

"She is bound for San Augustine, Pensacola, or Mobile, and I will visit each port but what I find her, should we lose sight of her to-night?"

And lose sight of the stranger in the darkness, they did, so orders were given to head for San Augustine.

This was done, and the yacht ran into the harbor and dropped anchor.

Just as she did so, a large vessel swung around with the tide, and displayed the strange craft they were in search of, anchored further inshore.

A cry of delight arose to the lips of Monte Cristo at the sight, and he said in a low tone:

"That is the craft I need and I will have her."

Calling to his mate to have a boat lowered, he rowed at once to the vessel and asked to see her commander.

He was ashore at the Anchor Inn, they told him on board, and thither he went and found De Silva, for it was none other than the beautiful brigantine that he so coveted and was determined to possess.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TELLTALE PORTRAITS.

THE skipper of the brigantine was greatly impressed with the appearance of Monte Cristo.

He saw in him a man whose age was hard to guess at, and one whose conscious power was stamped upon every feature of his handsome face.

One whose beauty of face at first appearing effeminate, would, upon a closer look seem the more manly on account of this very perfection of feature.

The tall, commanding form towered above the skipper, and the dark eyes seemed to look straight into his soul.

If he had made a somewhat reckless assertion, about having the brigantine at any price, he looked the one to stick to his determination.

"I am glad to meet you, Senor Monte Cristo, and will feel honored if you will join me in a bottle of wine, while we talk over the sale of the brigantine," said the skipper, politely, for the Senor De Silva could be very gentlemanly in his manners when he so desired to be.

"Thank you, senor; but as I have a most superior wine on my vessel, I will be glad to have you join me there," answered Monte Cristo.

The skipper was as cunning as a fox.

He was no man to be caught in a trap.

He had no reason to suspect treachery on the part of Monte Cristo, and scouted the idea that a man with such a face could be treacherous; but it was second nature for him to take care of himself.

He had but a short while before heard of the mysterious disappearance of Father Infelix, the worthy padre who had turned over to him, at the request of the Wandering Jew, the crew of the pirate vessel.

When a padre could disappear thus mysteriously, De Silva thought that the chances were in favor of a pirate doing the same; in fact, he gave the chances in favor of the pirate.

So he bowed low, smiled his sweetest, and, in answer to the invitation, said:

"Senor Monte Cristo, it would give me more than pleasure to accompany you on board of your vessel; but as the brigantine is the craft to be discussed, and there is one other interested in her sale, I will ask you to return with me on board of her, or to join me there at a later hour, as just now I have an engagement."

Monte Cristo was too polite to press the matter, and so said:

"Certainly, senor, I will come out to the brigantine this evening, at your invitation, and will be prepared to make the purchase."

He then bade the skipper adieu, and walked away, directing his steps to the landing, and taking his boat out to a large schooner-of-war that lay at anchor in the harbor.

He was received at the gangway by a midddy, who at once led him to the cabin, where the schooner's commander was seated, glancing over some official papers just received.

He was a youthful man for the rank he held, and in fact was only called captain by courtesy, being a lieutenant; but he had won his way up by dash and gallantry, and as commander of the schooner Lady of the Gulf, was feared by all outlaws on sea and along the coast, for his vessel did special duty as a Gulf Guard.

The young captain was a fine-looking, frank and fearless faced fellow, who received his visitor with sailor-like warmth, and was drawn toward him as one he felt he could trust.

"Senor Monte Cristo," he said, when his visitor had introduced himself, "I am glad to meet you, sir, and would be pleased to serve you, if it is in my power so to do; be seated, please."

Monte Cristo sat down and said in his low, rich tones:

"I have called upon you, Captain Herbert, to ask in regard to a Cuban pirate that has lately run down the Atlantic coast, and was last seen heading for the Gulf."

"I know of a West Indian pirate, sir, such as you describe, if you refer to a lateen-rigged craft, a *carera*, as the Spaniards call her class—"

"It is to just such a craft that I do refer, sir; can you tell me aught of her?" eagerly asked Monte Cristo.

"Yes, she now lies at anchor in this harbor."

"Thank God! and her captain and crew?" and Monte Cristo was upon his feet.

"I am sorry to say were not captured, sir."

"But surely there was a captive, a lady, found on the vessel?"

"No, Senor Monte Cristo; but let me tell you just how the *carera* came to be my prize," and Henry Herbert made known to Monte Cristo how he had captured the pirate through the Padre Infelix.

"This is remarkable, Captain Herbert, and I will now explain my interest in that vessel," and Monte Cristo told of the capture of his sister, and his having started upon the track of Perdido.

"And now, Captain Herbert, I find the vessel your prize, but can learn nothing of my poor sister, or Perdido and his crew," sadly said Monte Cristo.

"I regret I cannot give you more information, senor; but let us go to the Monastery Ramon, where the Padre Infelix made his home, and perhaps he may have been found, for since his giving over the pirate craft to me, he has most mysteriously disappeared, and I fear foul play in the matter, from Perdido and his crew."

"But, if he has been found he may be tempted to tell you something regarding your sister, should he know anything regarding her."

Monte Cristo willingly accompanied the young captain, and they were rowed rapidly up the harbor toward the water-gate of the monastery.

As they passed by the *carera* of Perdido, Monte Cristo gazed upon the strange craft with deepest interest, and muttered, as Captain Herbert spoke a few words to his officer in charge:

"Some day my revenge will come."

"It may be weeks, months, years ere it does; but some day it will come."

Henry Herbert heard the lowly-muttered words, and fairly started as he saw the look of intense, fiery hatred, that momentarily marred the beauty of the handsome face of the young sailor.

Arriving at the water-stairs of the monastery, they landed and approached the building, which was a grandly-built structure, at one time a villa, and the palatial home of Don Ramon, ere he put on the robes of a padre.

They were met at the outer portal by a priest and kindly invited in, but an air of gloom reated upon the place and all in it, for the missing priest had not been found.

"But have you no clew?" asked Captain Herbert.

"Alas, my son, we have just found a most sad clew," answered an aged priest, and he continued:

"Brothers Jean and Anselmo have just returned from a walk, and up the shore they found the crucifix of our poor brother and a part of his robe, and both were stained with blood."

"There were tracks leading to the water's edge, and it appeared, they tell me, as though there had been a desperate struggle there, and we believe that our poor brother has been foully murdered and his body cast into the sea by the pirates whose lives he saved."

"But it is Heaven's will!"

The two young men expressed a desire to visit the spot where the crucifix and part of the robe had been found, and they were taken thither, and after examining the locality thoroughly, and the traces left, came to the conclusion that Father Infelix had indeed been murdered, and thus the hope of hearing aught from him about his sister died from Monte Cristo's heart.

Returning by the monastery, the aged Superior asked if they would like to look upon the face of the lost padre, for they had a portrait of him.

Entering the monastery, they went to the room of the missing padre, and there beheld two portraits upon the wall.

One of these was with smooth shaven face in the garb of a priest, and the other was in the dress of a citizen, full bearded, and taken ere he had become a padre.

One glance upon the two portraits, and a cry broke from the lips of Monte Cristo, and he cried in hoarse tones:

"Great God! it is Don Rudolpho, the money-lender of New Orleans!"

Captain Herbert and the priests were all astounded at this bold declaration, and Father Dijon, the Superior, remarked reproachfully:

"No, senor, no; those are the portraits of poor Brother Infelix."

"When were they painted?" abruptly asked Monte Cristo.

"One a year ago, the other before he returned to the church and holy orders."

"I tell you that I would know that face in Purgatory."

"That man is no priest, and if he has served as such he has stolen the robes of the church to serve the devil in."

"I knew him as Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, and until now I believed him to be dead, slain by—but never mind, I find I was mistaken about his death, and I do not now believe that his life has ended, as you think, but that he leads you to believe so from some deep motive of his own."

"My son! my son! do not thus speak of our dear brother, for you are mistaken in the man," urged the Superior.

"Then am I mistaken in this, and this, and this?" and Monte Cristo hastily seized a gen-hilted rapier that hung on the wall, an inlaid writing-desk and a gold ink-horn and seal, while he continued:

"I know these things as though they were my own, for I have seen them hundreds of times."

"Still, my son, there is some mistake, for we owe this monastery and all to dear Brother Infelix."

"Doubtless, for he tried to clear his conscience by giving to the church; but it will not save him, and mark you, Sir Priests all, I will make it my duty to one day unmask that villain."

"Oh, my son! my son!" came in a chorus from the horrified padres.

But Monte Cristo went on:

"Ay, villain, I said, and worse, for he is all that is bad, as I will one day prove to you, for the cunning fiend is no more dead than I am, but pretends to be, that he may play some deep, devilish game."

"Here, Senor Padres, accept my little offering for your Order, and bear in mind that Monte Cristo has made no idle threat to expose that pretended priest, who calls himself Father Infelix."

As Monte Cristo spoke, he placed in the hand of the Superior a large purse heavy with gold, and raising his hat, left the monastery, followed

by the surprised young naval officer, who had discovered that his newly-made acquaintance was no ordinary personage.

CHAPTER XVII.

STRANGE RUMORS AFLOAT.

THE town of San Augustine was in a fever of excitement, for Padre Infelix, a man respected and beloved by all, one who had given up his home for a monastery, and gave freely of his gold to the poor, was missing, and rumor had it, had been foully dealt with.

It was known that in some way he had been instrumental in the capture of the lateen-rigged pirate craft, though his desire to save human life had caused him to allow the crew to escape.

What had become of the crew no one knew, some of them must have avenged themselves upon the padre for the loss of their vessel.

Then the pretty brigantine in the harbor was another cause for excitement, and people wondered what would be done with her.

The trim war schooner, the Gulf Guard, was also in port, and this caused the citizens to feel that no outbreak need be feared from the pirates, as Captain Herbert was the very man to hunt down the outlaws to the bitter end.

The yacht of Monte Cristo also came in for her share of talk and rumor, and, excepting her commander, no one was seen to hold communication with the shore, and boats that had gone near her for a closer look had been warned off.

A strange personage was also seen in the town, and no one knew from whence he had come, or aught regarding him, other than that he was stopping at the Anchor Inn, had the best room in the house and was known simply as the Wandering Jew of the Sea.

He spent his gold lavishly, and seemed to have an unlimited supply of it, while he was dignified in his bearing, and, upon learning of the mysterious disappearance of Padre Infelix, offered a large reward for the finding of him, dead or alive, or the arrest of his murderers if he was slain.

It was this man, the Wandering Jew, that Monte Cristo was anxious to meet.

He had, according to his agreement, gone out to the brigantine the evening that he had been invited on board, and had been well received by the skipper; but in answer to his request to know the price that the vessel would be sold for, Captain De Silva had told him that the one he had expected would meet him there, had sent word that he could not come.

In vain did Monte Cristo urge the skipper to put a price upon the craft, saying that he would willingly give it, for the reply was, that this other party had the refusal of the brigantine, and nothing could be done without seeing him.

Finding that there would be some delay, Monte Cristo suddenly moved on shore to the inn.

He was accompanied by several negro servants, and engaged rooms that were kept only for the most distinguished visitors; but he paid the enormous sum asked for them by the landlord, and began a life of such luxury, that mine host whispered around:

"This man must be a prince in disguise, for he spends twice what the rich Jew does."

Monte Cristo also trebled the reward offered by the Wandering Jew for the body of Father Infelix, dead or alive, or for his abductors, or murderers, as the case might be, and learning this the Jew doubled the amount of the young sailor, who coolly doubled that sum, and this set the town wild to win the fabulous prices to be paid for news of the padre.

The landlord of the inn, a jolly Englishman with the Spanish name of Amigos, let out a secret about the Jew which created considerable wonder.

This was how a handsome young stranger, representing himself as a secret officer of the Government, had come to the inn, making inquiries about the Wandering Jew.

He had taken a high-priced room, paid for it in advance, and gone to bed, as the Senor Amigos had believed.

But in the morning, upon rising early, the landlord told how he discovered the door of the stranger open, and that he was missing, though his lamp was still burning, and the bed had not been occupied.

Going to the door of the Jew's room, he found it ajar, and, to his amazement, upon the floor lay the stranger, gagged securely to prevent outcry, and bound hand and foot.

He had quickly released him, and, as he could not speak, his mouth being so dry and swollen from the gag, he had gone down to get him a drink to revive him.

Upon his return the stranger had mysteriously disappeared.

He was therefore unable to find out why he had been thus gagged and bound, and where the Jew had gone.

That night, however, the Wandering Jew had returned, and without giving any account of himself, when asked by the landlord about the stranger, simply replied that the fellow had come into his room in the night to rob him, and had not been successful in his effort.

These were the rumors afloat in the town

about the Wandering Jew, the stranger, Monte Cristo, the captured pirate craft, the missing crew and the lost padre, and it was no wonder that the people were excited, and anxiously awaiting the next turn in the tide of circumstances.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PIRATE'S PLOT.

IT would be speaking very mildly to say that Perdido, the Pirate, was in a towering rage at being so mastered by the Wandering Jew when he went to his room to kill and rob him.

He had seen the bag of gems which the Jew had shown so recklessly in paying for the brigantine, and he was determined to have them.

Then he had an idea that the Jew had some money or jewels about him.

Again, he felt most revengeful against him for having so thoroughly defeated him three times in the brigantine's cabin, not to speak of buying the vessel over his head by his fabulous offer for it.

When, therefore, he noiselessly sought the rooms of the Wandering Jew, in the Anchor Inn, it was a case of the intended biter being most severely bitten.

He had not the power to move, so securely was he bound, nor could he utter a cry for help, gagged as he was.

Thus, through the long hours of the night, he lay there in utter wretchedness, wondering what the morrow would bring forth.

When released by the landlord he had feigned greater distress than he really suffered, and he was anxious to escape, for he knew not what might be done with him.

Therefore, he had quickly made his escape, and sought a rendezvous where he knew that he would be welcomed.

This was at an ancient tavern on the shore.

It was built in a rambling kind of way, one wing running out over the water on a pier built for it, and its reputation was worse than its looks.

It was kept by a Spaniard, whom the officers of the law suspected of underhand work, yet could not catch him at his deviltry, or, if they did, were quickly silenced by a handsome souvenir in gold.

The result of this was that bad characters in general were supposed to make his tavern their abiding-place.

There was a tap-room on the street, a shop or two on either side, and an eating-house and a dozen sleeping-rooms, the rest of the old building being supposed to be too much in ruins to be habitable.

But it would have surprised the citizens of the town had they seen the pleasant quarters in that part of the old inn, which was considered deserted, into which Perdido the Pirate was ushered, upon making himself known to Jose Diaz, as the tavern-keeper was known.

"Well, captain, I wondered if you were not coming to see me," said Jose Diaz, as he ushered his guest through a dilapidated hallway and into a large room, most comfortably furnished, that overhung the water.

"I had to go to the Anchor for a purpose, Senor Jose, and am now in hiding; but bring me a bottle of your best, for my mouth is as dry as sand, and I need some breakfast as soon as it can be prepared."

"You will be safe here, captain, and I will give you as good as the Anchor can, only it is not known, as you are aware; but what news have you?"

"Nothing other than that the craft is hiding in a bayou down the coast, and I am here to try and get the pretty brigantine in the harbor."

"She is a beauty, senor, and she can be cut out, if she does lie so near the fort; but you look ill, and I will get you your breakfast."

The host hurried away, and after Perdido had eaten a hearty breakfast, he asked to be let rest until night.

Then when called, he said he was not well, and would still remain indoors, and left his supper untouched.

The following morning Jose came to him with news of a most startling nature, and to the effect that his vessel had been brought a prize in to port by the American schooner-of-war, Gulf Guard; his officers and crew had escaped and could not be found, and that the town was in a furor of excitement.

Perdido was almost wild at this piece of news, and raved like a madman.

How his vessel had been taken through the act of a priest, Padre Infelix, Senor Jose soon made known to him, and also that the officers had arrived at the tavern to seek shelter.

With these officers Perdido held an interview at once, and learned how the Padre Infelix had sent them on a wild-goose chase, showing them a ring they knew to be his, and saying that such were his orders.

For the first time then did Perdido miss a seal ring which he had worn, and this amazed him.

The officers, three in number, finding that they had been hoodwinked, had come to Senor

Diaz, to ask him to give them a hiding-place, but what had become of the crew they did not know.

"Senor Captain, I can tell you of your crew," said Jose Diaz, entering the room some hours after, where Perdido and his officers sat in utter dejection at the loss of their vessel.

"Well, Diaz, speak out," cried Perdido, excitedly.

"They are on board the brigantine."

"Ha! how know you this?"

"Through one of my spies."

"Good! then the brigantine is ours, for I will in some way communicate with the men, and when all is arranged, senors, we will board the vessel and seize her."

"This is glorious news you bring, and the luck changes for us, as the brigantine is the very craft we wish, and she shall fly the black flag within three days."

CHAPTER XIX.

A YOUNG REPROBATE.

HAVING decided upon what course to pursue, Perdido the Pirate at once entered upon arranging his plans for the capture of the brigantine.

How his men came to be upon the brigantine he could not understand, so he first intended to find that out.

Sending for Jose Diaz he asked him to have his spy, who had given him the information regarding the crew, brought before him.

The spy was a son of Jose Diaz, and fully as great a villain as was his father.

A youth of seventeen, he was yet without a conscience, cunning as a fox, and treacherous as a snake.

Gold was his god, and he would not move without being paid for it.

He came into the room of the pirate captain, who had his officers with him, still discussing their misfortune, and said, simply:

"The Senor Diaz tells me that you expressed a wish to see me, Captain Perdido?"

"I do wish to see you, Jose," said Perdido, addressing the youth, who was named after his father.

"I wish to have you tell me about your discovery on board the brigantine?"

Jose made no reply, but stared listlessly at his questioner.

The pirate captain repeated the question, and still the boy remained silent.

"Why do you not answer me?" sternly said Perdido.

The youth pointed to his tongue and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! you are dumb?"

The youth nodded.

"Perhaps this will oil your tongue," and Perdido put several gold pieces into his hand.

The youth shook his head.

"Oh! you wish more?"

Jose nodded, and Perdido trebled the amount. Then came quickly:

"What would the Senor Perdido wish to know?"

"You saw my crew on board the brigantine?"

"Yes, senor."

"When were you there?"

"This morning."

"Why did you go on board?"

"I take fish out to the captain, but do so to get any points of interest that might be floating around."

"It is strange the guard-boats do not notice the increased number of men on the brigantine."

"Only three are on deck at a time, senor, for a couple of hours, and the rest are in the hold, but all get an airing during the day, you see."

"You know my men, Jose?"

"Some of them."

"Who was it that you saw?"

"Mattocks, the Englishman was one, the names of the other two I do not know, though I saw them on your vessel when I went to you with letters some months ago."

"I see; but did you speak to Mattocks?"

"I recognized him, and wrote him a few lines."

"What did you write?"

"I asked him what he was doing there, and told him that I would return for an answer, and if I did not get one, he would hear from me."

"Have you been?"

"No, senor; I go out in half an hour with some things for the skipper, and will get my answer then."

"Jose, you are a shrewd, brave fellow."

"I am my father's son, senor."

"That is evident and besides his evil looks, you inherit his love of gold; but I wish you to serve me, and I will pay you well."

"Half cash in advance, senor."

"I will arrange the sum with your father."

"No, senor; my father and I are different beings."

"He looks after his business, and I take care of mine."

"Well, I will pay you five hundred dollars, half down, to serve me."

"Senor, I know just what you want."

"Well, Jose?"

"It is to cut out the brigantine with the aid

of your crew now on board, for during the moment that I saw Mattocks, he told me that all the lads were on board."

"You know just what I want, Jose."

"Then pay for it like a man, and don't ask me to accept five hundred dollars for getting you such a vessel as the brigantine."

"You are an avaricious rascal, Jose."

"I'll be old one of these days and need money to take care of me."

"You'll be hanged before you are twenty-one," gruffly said Perdido.

"Then I need gold to enjoy life with while I am."

"I will make it a thousand."

"No; I want two thousand, senior."

"You must not forget that my treasure was captured with my vessel."

"You did not come on shore a poor man, senior."

"Two thousand it must be, half down, and I'll do all I can to get you the brigantine."

"It's a bargain, and here is the gold."

The amount was counted out by the pirate, carefully recounted by Jose, and then, armed with a letter to Mattocks, the boatswain of the brigantine, he took his departure.

Getting his stores, he put them in his boat and rowed out to the brigantine.

Mattocks, contrary to his expectations, was on deck, and he handed him the letter.

Going off by himself, the pirate boatswain read it, wrote an answer on the back and slipped it into the youth's hand as he was going over the side.

Half an hour after Jose gave the answer to Perdido, who read it aloud to his comrades.

It was as follows:

"In answer to your questions, will say that a padre inveigled the officers from the craft by some excuse, and then influenced the men to save their lives by shipping on this vessel, which was then in the offing."

"The priest told us that a cruiser had the Sea Thief cut off from escape and she would be taken and all of us strung up."

"So we came on board, and have shipped for some cruise, but what we do not know."

"Come on board to-night, at midnight, and we will be ready to seize the vessel and run off with her."

"This is a grand scheme, Jose, and to-night we will get the vessel without a doubt."

"Then pay up now for my work," was the cool reply.

With a muttered curse upon the boy, Perdido paid the other thousand, and then turned to discuss their bright prospects with his officers, after telling Jose to be ready with a boat at midnight, and row them on board the brigantine, which he looked upon as already his own.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVENGEFUL BOATSWAIN.

SHORTLY after nightfall following the day upon which Jose, the young reprobate, carried the letter of Perdido, the Pirate, to Mattocks, the skipper of the coveted brigantine sat in his cabin over a bottle of wine.

He was thinking over the strange conduct of the Wandering Jew in not coming off to the vessel and having an interview with Monte Cristo, as he had promised to do, and that it would be decided who was to own the vessel.

The Jew had expressed a willingness to meet the rich young yachtsman on board, but had failed to appear at each appointment made for him, although Monte Cristo was on hand.

Of course De Silva could do nothing without the Jew, and thus the affair had fallen through thus far, though Monte Cristo still expressed his determination to buy the beautiful vessel at any price.

Suddenly down the companionway came Mattocks, the boatswain of the pirate crew then on board, and who were fretting at having to remain below decks, waiting for the vessel to sail.

"Well, my man, why did you not have the mate announce you?" sternly said the skipper, wondering at the coming of the pirate.

"I did not wish any one to see me come to the cabin, sir, for I want to have a private word with you."

"Out with it, then."

"You know, sir, we shipped with you for a steady cruise, and thereby saved our necks," said Mattocks.

"Yes."

"Well, sir, you got all but our captain, his officers, and an old black witch we call the Ebony Imp."

"Well?"

"We forgot about the old woman, as she was asleep, until after we left the vessel, and yet she was not found on the craft when the schooner-of-war took her, so they say."

"I am right glad she did not come on board with you, for I hate a witch as I do Satan."

"And so do I, sir."

"Well, what does all this tend to, my man?"

"Just this, sir, that there is a reward offered for the capture of Perdido, the Pirate."

"I know that well."

"It is five thousand in gold."

"Yes."

"I'm only a poor pirate, sir; but I will share the five thousand with you, if you say so, skipper."

"What! do you know how you can capture Perdido?"

"I do, sir."

"When?"

"To-night."

"How?"

"I can have him come on board the brigantine with his officers."

"The deuce you can!" cried De Silva, excitedly.

"Yes, sir."

De Silva was silent a moment.

He remembered Perdido's threat to do him harm, and the Wandering Jew had told him how he had attempted to assassinate him, and then rob him.

Free, he had cause to fear him, and he had never liked the young pirate chief.

Now it was in his power to get rid of a dangerous enemy, and at the same time make some gold by doing so.

Free, and with his crew on board the brigantine, and doubtless most, if not all of them, faithful to him, Perdido was to be feared, De Silva well knew.

Hence he decided to come to terms with the pirate boatswain, so said, after his few moments of silent thought:

"Well, explain yourself fully, my man, and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"To begin, sir, I don't wish to be called a traitor, but Captain Perdido once had me triced up and severely rat-o'-nine-tailed for something I did not do."

"It laid me up for weeks, and when he found out I was innocent, and a pet of his guilty, he laughed and said that the scoring I got would not go amiss."

"Yet he made you boatswain?"

"Yes, sir, but it was because I spoke Spanish, Portuguese, French and English, and can therefore give orders to all of the men; whereas he speaks only Spanish and English, as do the other officers."

"Now, skipper, I swore to be avenged on Captain Perdido for the wrong he did me, and afterward refused to acknowledge, and I have my chance to get my revenge now."

"His officers are a mean lot too, and I will put Perdido and his three lieutenants in your hands to-night, if you say the word and will divide the reward with me equally, and give me the berth of mate on the brigantine, in the cruise she is to make."

"Well, it is a bargain, so now tell me how the thing is to be done."

"I received a letter to-day, sir, from Captain Perdido, asking me to hold myself and the crew in readiness to-night for his coming."

"He is to board her with his officers, about midnight, in a shore boat, and we are to have all ready to slip the cable and let the brigantine drift off with the tide, while you and your men are to be seized, at a given time, and thus prevented from making any outcry."

"You, sir, Captain Perdido seems particularly anxious to capture, as he says he has a little debt to pay you."

De Silva was white with rage when he heard this well-arranged plot, and springing to his feet, paced to and fro for some moments, until he could get control over himself.

This he soon did, and turning to the pirate boatswain, he said:

"My man, you shall have three thousand of the five offered for Perdido's head, and I will make you my first mate, for you deserve it."

"But is it surely arranged, as you say?"

"Yes, sir, for I wrote him word, by the messenger that brought his note, telling him all would be ready to seize the vessel at the appointed time."

"Good! but who was this messenger?"

"That I must refuse to tell, sir; for I wish no harm to come to him, as he may be of service to me some other time."

"As you please; but now go forward once more, and I will arrange for the reception to-night of that arch traitor, Perdido, the Pirate, and woe unto him," was the threatening remark of the skipper of the brigantine.

CHAPTER XXI.

A YOUNG SCHEMER.

PERDIDO and his officers passed the afternoon in impatient anxiety.

They knew that they were being sought for far and wide, as were also their men, for it became a query with all what had become of the crew of the lateen-rigged pirate.

They were aware also of the fact that the Padre Infelix was missing, and that, his crucifix and some of his garb having been found stained with blood, they were supposed to have killed him.

As for themselves, they considered that they were safely hidden in the old ruin; but they feared that it might be discovered in some way that their crew were on board the brigantine, and thus their plans be thwarted.

What was to be done with the brigantine, by those who had shipped the pirate crew, they could not tell; but they did not doubt that De Silva intended turning her into a pirate.

What the Jew intended by his purchase, Perdido could not guess; but it was his intention to have his revenge upon De Silva, for not allowing him to have the vessel, as it was also upon the Jew.

De Silva, being on board the brigantine when they seized her, would naturally fall into his hands, and the Wandering Jew he was determined to get into his clutches in some way.

Perdido knew well the great danger of seizing the vessel, and getting her out of port; but he must take the chances.

If De Silva and his own men could be quietly seized, gagged and bound, the brigantine, if her cable was cut, would drift off with the tide from under the guns of the fort, and once he had a good start he would set sail upon the craft and run her to sea.

There was one thing particularly which he did not like, and that was the presence in port of the American schooner-of-war, Gulf Guard.

He had had occasion to know just what a wide-awake young sailor Henry Herbert was, and he knew that the Gulf Guard was a very fleet vessel.

But he was in for it, and he must take the consequences.

The Jew, however, was to be inveigled into the trap, that was certain, for Perdido knew if he could carry him off he had ample opportunity for revenge, while he felt assured that the strange old man carried about him a large fortune in gems.

There was one thing that puzzled the pirate, and this was what had become of Lita, his fair captive.

He had heard nothing said of her, in the capture of the vessel, and he was at a loss to account for it.

He would question the youthful Jose Diaz upon the subject of the maiden, and also arrange with him a plan to get the Jew on the brigantine.

Having come to this determination, he pulled the bell-rope, which would inform the landlord that his pirate guests needed him.

In a short while the Senor Diaz put in an appearance, with a:

"Well, seniors?"

"Where is your boy, Jose?"

"I just caught the young rascal fishing for a cat out of the window, and I gave him a good thrashing, for a number saw his act, and though I do not care a peso for the cat, I must preserve the air of being humane and kind."

"Fishing for a cat?" asked Perdido.

"Yes, senior."

"That is a kind of fish I do not know of."

"It was no fish, senior, but a cat."

"You see the boy tied a large hook to a string and put on it some meat and let it down from the upper window into the street."

"An old dame's cat, that lives next door, grabbed the bait and attempted to run off with it, when that Satan's imp—"

"Your son, Diaz?"

"Yes, my son, hauled her up into the window, while some of the crowd called out that it was cruel."

"I was asleep in my easy-chair outside, and he lowered the infernal brute down upon my head, and for a moment I believed the Devil had his claws upon me—you see where she scratched me, seniors—and so I whipped the boy for his cruelty to the cat."

"Yes, I see, and not for his cruelty to his father; but, Jose, that boy will put a knife in you some day when you attempt to chastise him."

"Caramba! but I believe you, Captain Perdido; but you wish the boy?"

"Yes, I have work for him."

"I will send him to you, captain; but remember to pay me for his work, and for his services this morning."

"I paid him, Jose."

"Caramba! and he told me that I was to collect from you."

"Well, we won't quarrel, Jose, but he is a most exorbitant young wretch."

"Like as not, senior, you give him a hundred pesos?" inquiringly said the landlord.

"I paid him well, Jose: but please send him to me."

The landlord departed and soon after Jose junior put in an appearance, his face wreathed in smiles at the remembrance of the scratches the cat had given his father.

"Jose, I want you."

"Well, senior?"

"Did you hear aught of a young lady being found on my vessel?"

Jose remained silent.

Perdido repeated the question, and still Jose answered not.

"What! dumb again?"

The boy nodded.

"I will have to tell your father what I paid you."

"He asked me, and suggested that I must have given you at least a hundred pesos," significantly said Perdido.

"Caramba! don't tell the old man, senor, for he will get my gold from me."

"Then answer me."

"No, senor, I heard nothing of a lady captive."

"You say you heard nothing, and so emphasize your words as to imply that you know something?"

"I do."

"What do you know?"

"It is worth fifty pesos to tell, senor."

"You shall have them."

"Well, senor, I saw the face of a lady at the port, and it was the prettiest face I ever saw."

"On the brigantine?"

"Yes, senor."

"When did you see her?"

"This morning."

"Ha! then I shall indeed be in luck, in cutting out the brigantine, for I will get my fair captive back again, and she is worth a fortune."

"Aha! Captain Perdido, you are in good luck!"

The last remark was made to himself, and aloud he asked:

"Jose, have you seen an old Jew about the town?"

"Yes, senor."

"Where is he?"

"Stopping at the Anchor, and they do say he is as rich as a prince."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, senor, and he makes his gold fly, and has a number of servants about him."

"The old villain!"

"But there is a young blood who is his equal for style and making his money fly."

"Who is he?"

"They call him Monte Cristo, and he came here in his own pleasure yacht, and with negro slaves."

"He has taken rooms at the Anchor, too, and between the two of them, this Monte Cristo and the Jew, old Senor Amigo is almost crazy with delight; but—"

"But what, Jose?"

"I can't talk any more."

"Why can you not?"

"I have said too much."

"What do you mean, Jose?" eagerly asked Perdido, excited by the boy's manner.

"I mean I've talked more than the fifty pesos called for."

"More talk, more pesos."

"Curse your avariciousness; but you shall have fifty more."

"Pay up, then."

Perdido handed out fifty pesos.

"Fifty more, senor."

"In advance, you rascal?"

"Yes, senor."

The balance was given him.

"Now, Jose, what else about this young blood and the Jew?"

"Nothing more, senor."

Perdido looked as though he intended to spring upon the boy; but checking the impulse, he said:

"Jose, I wish you to earn that last money by doing some work for me."

"What is it, senor?"

"I wish you to see the Jew to-night, just before you come to row us out to the brigantine."

"Yes, senor."

"No, you must first get a boat for us, and give us the dress of common sailors, with a false beard or so."

"I will, senor."

"We will go to the lower pier and there await you."

"Where am I to go, senor?"

"Up to the Anchor Inn and ask for this old Wandering Jew as he calls himself."

"Yes, senor."

"Tell him that De Silva, the skipper of the brigantine, has sent you after him, for he is needed at once on board."

"Will he go, senor?"

"If he does not, hint that Captain De Silva has heard of a plot to seize the brigantine, and wishes to see him on board at once, as he has already gotten the captain of the American schooner to go on board with a few of his men."

"I'll tell him, senor."

"Well, I'll leave it to you Jose, to get him there."

"I can do it; but it's worth something."

"I'll pay you well for it, if you get the Jew out to the brigantine."

"How much, and when?" was the cool query.

"I will pay you five hundred pesos."

"That Jew is rich, senor."

"What has that to do with it?"

"He carries a fortune about him."

"Well, I'll give you a thousand."

"Don't tell the old man."

"No."

"Then it's a bargain," and Jose left the room.

Soon after his father entered.

"Senor Captain, my boy told me you had work for him to do."

"I have."

"Well, senor, you ought to pay me for my boy's services."

"I will pay him, Jose."

"No; he will squander the money, while I will lay it up for a rainy day."

"I must receive the money, or he cannot go, and I have locked him up in the cellar on account of his treatment of me with the cat."

"You must let him out, Jose, for it is twilight now, and the work he has to do for me is most important," said Perdido, impatiently.

"What is it, senor?"

He was told.

"Senor, this is an important service, and one which I could not render you, nor any one else."

"Promise me a thousand pesos, and he can go."

"Holy furies! you are robbing me, Jose Diaz!"

"I am getting a small percentage, you a large fortune, senor."

"Well, release the boy, and I will pay you the money."

Jose senior smiled and retired from the room, going down-stairs, where Jose junior, instead of being locked up, was attending to the wants of thirty patrons of the low inn.

Without being in each other's confidence, the father and son were playing a winning game for themselves.

When Jose junior had work to do he never neglected it, and consequently got the disguises needed by the pirates in readiness, and then took them to the room where the four pirate officers were waiting, and looking out upon the harbor, dotted with numerous vessels, through the window, for, after nightfall, they had opened the shutters.

Then Jose went to a room built upon the pier over the water, and raised a trap in the flooring.

A boat lay beneath, and this was gotten ready with cushions and oars.

At eleven o'clock the youth went to the upper room and bade his guests follow him.

Descending to the room over the pier, they went through the trap into the boat, which was then let out of the basin through a false bulkhead, that was securely closed after it.

Then they pulled to a pier not far distant, the boy acting as coxswain, the four officers at the oars, and landing, the former started on his mission to entice the Wandering Jew on board the brigantine.

As he walked up the street, he was suddenly overtaken by a tall man wearing a cloak.

"My lad, from which vessel did you come?" asked the stranger.

"From the American brigantine, sir," answered Jose, saluting politely, as he recognized Monte Cristo in his questioner.

"Is her captain on board, my lad?"

"Yes, sir," and as a bright idea struck the young rascal that he might entice the rich stranger on board, too, and thereby get more money from Perdido, he said:

"Captain De Silva sent me ashore, sir, to ask an old man they call the Wandering Jew, and a handsome, rich young senor, whose name is Monte Cristo, to come out to the brigantine, as he wishes to see them immediately."

"Indeed! I am glad that I met you, my lad, for I am the Senor Monte Cristo, and I will await your return here with the Wandering Jew, for I wished to go on board the brigantine to-night."

"Yes, sir, I shall not be long," and the daring boy hastened on toward the Anchor Inn, wondering if he could get Monte Cristo and the Jew out to the brigantine together without exciting suspicion of foul play.

CHAPTER XXII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

WHEN Jose, junior, arrived at the Anchor Inn, he was met by Landlord Amigos.

The latter did not like the father of the youth, but the son he had nothing against, and, in fact, it had once been young Jose's good fortune to draw the Senor Amigos out of the water one day when his boat capsized, and in many ways he had sought to return the favor then done him.

"Well, Master Jose, have you come to eat a little midnight supper with your old friend, for I always take a bite before retiring?" asked Landlord Amigos kindly as the lad entered the tap-room.

"No, thank you, senor, for I have supped; but I have been sent on a message to the old white-bearded gentleman that is putting up with you."

"Ah! the Wandering Jew?"

"Yes, senor."

"He has gone up to his rooms half an hour since; but I will call one of his servants and see if he has retired."

Word came back that the Wandering Jew would see the visitor, whoever it was, and Jose was escorted to the room of the strange

old man, whose appearance in the town was creating so much comment.

"Vell, mine young fri'nt, I vas more as glat to see you—some vine here, poy, for t'e shentilmans—no, no vine?—vell, dat is petter so, for vine makes young peoples fools, put it ish goot for old peoples."

"You vas vant to see me, t'e lantlort sent me vord?"

"Yes, senor, I have charge of a harbor boat, and the brigantine's skipper hailed me to-night and bade me go at once and seek you, asking you to come on board, as it was important that he should see you, and also a young gentleman who is here at the inn."

"Vas anyt'ing t'e matters mit t'e prigan-tine, mine young fri'nt?"

"I think, senor, that the skipper has found out that there will be an attack on him, and he wishes to ask your advice."

"Vas dat so? Vell, I vill go mit you pretty quick; but who vas t'e young shentilmans dat he vas vant, too?"

"You know a young blood here that they call Monte Cristo?" asked Jose in a whisper, and with a knowing look.

"Yes, I vas know of t'e young mans."

"Well, the skipper only wants to get him on board the brigantine, and then you will know what's up; but of course he did not tell me, only hinted that it was most important to have you come, and the young gentleman, too."

"Ah! vell, I goes mit you now; but vere vas t'e young mans?"

"He is waiting for us near the landing, for I met him and asked him to go."

The Jew said no more, but going into an inner room, soon returned ready for the trip.

Leaving the inn with Jose, the two went together to the landing, and there met Monte Cristo.

The boat lay there, too, with its four pirate oarsmen in the disguise of honest seamen, and when Jose had ushered the Jew and Monte Cristo into the stern-sheets, he gave the order to:

"Give way!"

"Ish dis t'e young gentlemen, mine young fri'nt?" asked the Wandering Jew of Jose, and referring to Monte Cristo.

"Yes, senor."

"As we both dwell beneath the same roof, senor, and have been sent for by the skipper of the brigantine on some important mission, allow me to introduce myself as Monte Cristo, a Sailor of Fortune, sir," said Monte Cristo, politely addressing the Jew.

"I vas glad to meet you, senor, ant I vas introduce mineself as t'e Vandering Jew mit t'e Sea."

Monte Cristo bowed, and Perdido, and his comrades were delighted at the prospect of having the rich young sailor in their power, and of whom Jose and his father had both spoken.

That he had been so cleverly caught in their net, along with the Jew, they felt was owing to the cunning of their youthful ally, Jose Diaz.

Who he was in reality they did not know; but he was certainly enormously rich, from the rumors regarding him, and Perdido chuckled with delight when he thought how, in losing his schooner the Sea Thief, he was to gain the brigantine, and besides, get Lita once more into his clutches, have the Jew a prisoner, along with De Silva, and, with Monte Cristo his captive, be able to demand a fabulous ransom.

It was when such thoughts as these were running in his mind that the vessel was hailed.

"Ho that boat!"

"Ahoy, the brigantine!" answered Jose.

"What boat is that?" came in a voice which Jose and the pirate recognized as that of Mattocks.

"The brigantine," answered Jose, and then followed gruffly:

"Ay, ay, come alongside."

A moment after and Monte Cristo sprang on deck, and turning, politely offered his hand to the aged Jew, who accepted it with:

"I t'ank you, mine fri'nt, for myself vas not so spry as I vas."

The four pirates followed Jose on deck, and Mattocks met them at the gangway, saying:

"You would see the captain, senors?"

"Yes, sir," answered Monte Cristo, adding:

"He sent for us to come on board."

Mattocks was surprised to see the Jew, and also Monte Cristo, and it was evident that he could not understand their presence.

The four pretended seamen he knew to be Perdido and his comrades, and picking out the former from his bearing, for the chief wore a heavy beard, he stepped to his side and said, in a low tone:

"All right, captain; when you give the word the lads are ready."

"Good!" answered Perdido, and he started on with the others toward the cabin, when Jose caught him by the arm and extended his hand.

Perdido understood the silent appeal and gave him a bag of gold.

"Another for Monte Cristo, senor."

With an oath the pirate handed over another purse, when Jose slipped over the side of the brigantine, cast loose the painter, and pulling away with a swift, strong stroke, muttered:

"Now let them have it out among themselves, for I have done my work and got my pay, and that craft just now is no place for Jose Diaz, junior."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A JEW'S MERCY.

IF Monte Cristo and the Wandering Jew deemed it strange that the four seamen should follow them into the cabin of the brigantine, they made no comment upon the subject.

They were aware that the vessel was under merely merchant-service discipline, and did not expect man-of-war behavior in the crew.

Mattocks led the way, entering first.

The skipper was seated at the table, apparently engaged in writing, but arose as the Wandering Jew entered.

He looked surprised, and the look increased to astonishment when he beheld Monte Cristo.

Could it mean that Mattocks, after all, had deceived him?

Then he saw the four seamen in the background, and as Perdido was in disguise, did not recognize him.

"Vell, mine fri'nt skipper, ve has comed as vas your vish," said the Jew.

"My wish, senor? Surely there is some mistake. But, senor, you are quite welcome, though it is an unexpected pleasure in seeing the Senor Monte Cristo, while I cannot understand why you have brought your boat's crew also into my cabin."

It was evident that the skipper was nettled somewhat, as well as amazed.

The Jew had, of course, a right to come on board of his own vessel, and what was more, he had wished to have the mysterious old purchaser of the brigantine meet the Monte Cristo, and had thus far failed in bringing them together.

Now they came in company on board the brigantine, when he was expecting Perdido and his officers, and brought with him four seamen.

The Wandering Jew saw at a glance that he had been deceived, and was not expected on board the brigantine.

Monte Cristo quickly took in the same situation, and expecting a trap of some kind, dropped his hand upon the hilt of his sword, while he stepped to one side of the cabin, in a position to face the party, should there be a conspiracy against him.

Seeing now that he must act, Perdido came forward, just as the Wandering Jew turned, and his eyes for the first time fell upon the face and form of Monte Cristo in a bright light.

He had seen him at the inn once or twice at a distance, and sat next to him in the boat on the way out to the brigantine, but never had a view of his face.

Now it was plainly revealed by the cabin lamp.

Tall, commanding in form, haughty in bearing, dressed with exquisite taste and richness in an undress uniform that belonged to no special service but the sea, Monte Cristo flashed upon the Jew like a meteor, for he started back with a cry upon his lips,

as though wrung from him by intense amazement and alarm.

But quickly recovering himself, he asked, in a voice that seemed suppressed:

"Who vas you, mine fri'nt?"

"Monte Cristo is my name, senor, as I told you," was the calm reply.

"Oh! you vasso like t'e image of my poor sister Rebecca's deat son, that I vas surprised like I vas seen my nephew Isaac's ghost."

"No, senor, I am a very real personage, and assure you there is nothing that is ghostly about me," answered Monte Cristo, with a smile, and then he added, addressing the skipper:

"As there seems to be some mistake, and the Senor De Silva evidently has not expected me as a visitor, I will retire."

"Permit me, senors, to explain," and Perdido stepped forward, while his three comrades ranged themselves across the companionway.

"I confess to not having expected either the Wandering Jew nor the Senor Monte Cristo as my guests, though I am glad to welcome them as such; but if you can explain the mystery that seems to enshroud us all, I shall be most happy to have you do so, my man," and the skipper turned to the supposed seaman.

"The mystery, senors, can be readily explained, when I tell you that the meeting in this cabin was of my bringing about, and you will all see the necessity of submitting quietly when I tell you that you are my prisoners, for my crew holds possession of this vessel."

With a bound Monte Cristo was by the side of Perdido, and a blow felled him his full length upon the floor, while his three companions were hurled aside with a force that sent them into a corner of the cabin.

Springing up the companionway, Monte Cristo beheld a crowd of armed men confronting him.

But so irresistible was his rush that they gave way before him, and with a mighty leap he went over the stern into the sea.

The suddenness of Monte Cristo's onslaught and escape took all by surprise; but quickly recovering himself, De Silva seized a cutlass that hung near him, and before Perdido, could arise, had the point at his heart, while he cried:

"Senor, you are my prisoner, for now I recognize in you Perdido, the Pirate."

"Ho, Mattocks! let the crew do their duty!"

In an instant a dozen men bounded down the companionway, and the comrades of Perdido were seized and securely bound, the Wandering Jew having retreated to a corner meanwhile, from whence he was coolly taking in the situation.

"Traitors! devils! Mattocks, you treacherous hound, what means this?" shouted Perdido, frenzied with passion.

"It means, Senor Perdido," said the skipper, calmly, "that I discovered your intention of seizing my brigantine with the aid of your crew now on board, and determined to thwart it."

"The Senor Mattocks here, had an old grudge to square with you, and determined to settle it, while your crew have remained true to me, and for capturing Perdido the Pirate, and his officers, will readily be pardoned by the Government, especially as they had already shipped in an honest service."

"Curses on you, De Silva! but you shall hang with me, if I die on the yard-arm," cried Perdido.

"Oh, no, senor, not I."

"Yes, for I shall tell that you were one of the Giant Buccaneer's lieutenants, how you betrayed him, and built this very brigantine with his money."

"You would not be believed, Senor Perdido, if you did; but I shall take good care that you see no one to whom you can trump up lies about me."

"But to continue my explanation, and which I wish the Wandering Jew to understand."

"With Mattocks I arranged that you should come on board with your officers, and be seized, instead of seizing; but I confess that it was a surprise to me when you came in disguise, accompanied by the wandering Jew and the Senor Monte Cristo."

"But I think I can understand their presence, when I take into consideration your grasping character, and thirst for revenge,

for you sought to get the Wandering Jew and the Senor Monte Cristo into your power, as well as myself and the brigantine."

"You overreached yourself badly, Senor Perdido, for you and your officers are my prisoners, and to-morrow will I get the reward offered for you, while the brigantine is safe, this old gentleman is not in your power, as you had hoped, and that daring man, who so boldly made his escape, when he believed this vessel was in the possession of pirates, I hope has come to no harm by springing overboard with his clothing and weapons on."

"He was not seen to rise, sir," said a seaman who just then entered the cabin.

"Lower a boat and make search for him, then, and lively, for he may sadly need aid," ordered De Silva.

"No, let no mans move, vile I have my leetle talk," called out the Wandering Jew, stepping forward.

"But, senor, the gentleman may drown," urged De Silva.

"Vell, he had petter stay out of t'e oceans; but I has a vords to say."

"But, senor—"

"Mine fri'nt, who vas own dis prigan-tine?" sternly asked the Jew.

"You do, senor," sullenly answered the skipper.

"Vell, I vill pe opeyed, and no mistake, pretty quick."

"T'e Senor Monte Cristo took his chance mit mineselfs, and he took t'e same chances in his escape, and again mit t'e vater."

"He vas right to spring mit t'e sea, to get away, put if he don't vas swim like a ducks, vell, he must go to t'e pottoms like von stone."

"Now, t'e Senor Pertido ish a pad mans, and so vas his t'ree fri'nts; put ash he don't vas catch us, and ve ish safe, and t'e prigan-tine vas safe, so I says let t'e puccaneer ant his fri'nts go."

"I'll see them—"

It was evident that the skipper was going to say something very profane; but the Wandering Jew interrupted quickly and sternly with:

"Holt on, Senor Skipper, for I ish a gentlemen's dat hash my own vay, and don't you make any mishtake mit me."

"I says dat t'e puccaneers ish to go free."

"But why, Senor Jew?" asked De Silva, while Mattocks and the others of the crew present looked on in amazement.

"Pecause I vas say so, mine fri'nt," was the laconic response.

"That is no reason," growled Mattocks.

"Vell, you vill fint dat it vas some reason, my mans, and pretty quick, too."

"I says t'e pirates ish to go."

"Senor Jew, there is a reward offered for these men, and this man has a right to claim it, for Perdido and his officers have been captured through him," and De Silva pointed to Mattocks.

"Vat vas t'e reward?" asked the Jew.

"Five thousand for Perdido and a thousand each for his officers."

"Eight t'ousants?"

"Yes, senor."

"Mine fri'nt, here ish t'e monish, eight t'ousants, and ten t'ousants more pesos to pe give to t'e crew."

"Ash I vas puy t'e puccaneers, t'ey ish to go now."

As he spoke, the Wandering Jew counted out the gold from a large bag he wore suspended to his waist.

A cheer burst from the men at this, and Perdido and his comrades seemed utterly astounded.

It was very evident that the Wandering Jew had won over the crew to liking him, while De Silva could not account for his strange conduct in paying out thousands to set a man free who was a curse upon the seas, and more, had sought bitter revenge against the very one who was then saving his neck from the gallows.

"And you mean to set these men free?" asked De Silva.

"I does so means, mine fri'nt."

"Let 'em pe put on shore mit a poat pretty quick."

"Mattocks, put those devils ashore; but, Perdido, remember, some day we may meet again, when you are dependent upon mine, not a Jew's mercy, and then beware," sternly said De Silva.

"I take this as a threat, De Silva, and so remember it.

"You, Senor Jew, whatever motive you may have for setting us free, and paying the reward asked for our heads, I know not; but I thank you, and wish you well, while I beg you to accept from me the money you have just paid out."

"No, Puccaneer Perdido, your monish vas plood monish, and I don't want it.

"Now pegone, before I vas change my minds and have you hanged up mit t'e yard-arms."

Perdido paled at this hint, and bowing low, left the cabin with his companions, and half an hour after was again in hiding in the old inn of Jose Diaz, and plotting once more some way to get command of a vessel above the decks of which he could again float the black flag.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE JEW AND THE SKIPPER.

AFTER the four pirate officers and the crew had left the cabin of the brigantine, De Silva turned to Mattocks and said:

"Senor, go on deck and see that the wishes of this gentleman are carried out.

"Then assume the duties of my first officer for I desire to keep faith with you, although the senor here has seen fit to undo our good work."

"Thank you, Senor Captain, and will you kindly keep my gold for me?" and Mattocks handed over the golden reward, willing to show confidence in De Silva, and give him to understand that, although he had received the entire amount, he intended to give him his share.

After Mattocks had retired, De Silva turned to the Wandering Jew, who had calmly taken a seat.

"Senor, you doubtless had some good motive in acting as you did toward Perdido and his pirate shipmates?"

"Yesh, mine fr'int."

"Will you tell me the motive?"

"No, mine fr'int."

De Silva bowed to this rebuff, and asked: "Then may I inquire what your wishes are regarding the brigantine?"

"T'e prigantine vas all right, don't she?"

"Yes, senor; but do you wish her to remain longer in the harbor?—for remember, we have half a hundred men hiding between decks by day, and they grow restless.

"Dat vas so."

"Yes, senor, and more, as the secret has seemed already to become known, for Perdido knew it, that the pirate crew are on board, we may be searched by that American schooner now in port."

"Vell, dat vas true, too."

"And if searched, senor, the fair captive we have on board will also be found, and—"

"You vas right, mine fr'int, t'e young laty would pe found, that vas so."

"I am sorry that the padre brought her on board, for he could have carried her to town with him."

"T'e padre obeyed mine orders, mine fr'int, for I vas told him to sent mit t'e prigantine all vat he finds on poard t'e pirate vessel."

"There was said to be one old negress, a Witch, on board the vessel, too; but she was not found by the cruiser's crew."

"So I vas hear, and t'e padre he vas tells me that t'e olt plack Vitcher Vomans vas try to kill him mit a knife, and he kills her mit a pullet, and yet she vas not found on poard py t'e Americans."

"The padre killed a woman?" asked De Silva, in a tone of scorn.

"It vas a Vitcher Vomans, mine fr'int, and she vas kill t'e padre if t'e padre don't vas kill her."

"It seems hard, though, for a padre to kill a woman."

"It vas seems harder for a Vitcher Vomans to kill a padre, mine fr'int."

"You vas see that a mans as vas like you, or me, or other mans, could not kill a Vitcher Vomans, but a padre has t'e power to kill her, vas you sees that?"

"I know that the power of the priest is far greater than ours, and I suppose it is given to padres to check the charms of witches; but I fear his now being lost or dead has something to do with his killing the old

Witch," and De Silva shuddered, for he was full of the superstition of those times.

"Vell, mine fr'int, you vas think t'e prigandage had petter sail from t'e harbor?" asked the Wandering Jew, after a few moments of silence.

"Or get rid of the crew, and the young lady captive, senor, so that if searched they will not be found on board."

"You vas correct, mine fr'int, and I will put my cargoes on poard to-morrow nights."

De Silva was glad to hear this, but said:

"You remember that I told you that I had an offer for the brigantine?"

"Yesh, you vas told me."

"The young gentleman offered to buy her at any price, senor."

"Will he give more ash I pay for her?"

"That remains to be seen, senor; but from what people say of him he has unlimited riches."

"Vell, who vas he?"

"Monte Cristo."

"Ah! he vas mit t'e pottom of t'e vaters mit t'e fishes."

"He may, and he may not be, senor; but I gave him a refusal of the brigantine, and told him I would arrange for a meeting with her owner, and if he offered what would tempt you, I thought he might get her."

"Vell, I tells you, mine fr'int."

"I vas pay von hundred and fifty t'ousand, don't I?"

"Yes, senor."

"Does t'e gentlemen know I vas t'e owner?"

"No, senor."

"Vell, you vas send in t'e mornings for t'e Monte Cristo, if he vas not drown himself to-night mit t'e vaters, and tell him t'ere vas anot'er gentlemen, that vas me, as vants t'e prigantine, and ve both comes together here in t'e cabins, and see vich of us vill own t'e vessel."

"If t'e Monte Cristo vas pay my price, t'en I vill be meestakens."

"Yes, senor, I will arrange for the meeting," answered De Silva, and at the request of the Jew, he called a boat's crew to set the strange old man on shore.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SENOR DE SILVA MAKES A VISIT.

THE Senor De Silva had expected trouble to follow the scenes upon the brigantine.

He had an idea in his mind that Monte Cristo had not been drowned, as had been the impression and seeming wish of the Wandering Jew.

There was that about Monte Cristo which inspired the skipper with the impression that he was a man of great reserve force.

He had admired his bold act in leaving the cabin against what he believed was fearful odds.

Believing that Monte Cristo had thought that to remain was death to him, and to escape the chances were a hundred to one against him, he admired the prompt manner in which he had taken the chances.

If he succeeded in reaching the shore, he did not doubt but that the rich young stranger would quickly make known what was transpiring upon the brigantine.

Perhaps he might, if a good swimmer and conscious of his powers of endurance, swim to the American cruiser Gulf Guard, and soon return with her boats crowded with men.

Or, he might reach his own yacht and send a boat to the schooner-of-war to report what was going on upon the brigantine.

Now all these things passed through the mind of De Silva, and as soon as the Wandering Jew departed, he determined to act at once.

There was one secret regarding the pretty craft which the skipper had not made known to the purchaser.

This secret the reader will discover by following the movements of the Senor De Silva, as soon as the Wandering Jew had departed.

His first act was to go to a state-room amidships.

Taking a key from a bunch upon his belt he opened a door, after he had knocked and received permission to enter.

Half-reclining upon a divan, and dressed in a wrapper, was a female form.

As the skipper entered, the occupant of the state-room gazed up at him.

It was Lita, the sister of Monte Cristo.

"Oh, senor, what has happened?" she asked, in a startled way.

Her face was pale, as could be seen when the lamp's rays fell upon it, and her manner was somewhat nervous, though she made an effort to be calm.

"Lady, nothing of serious import has happened other than that Perdido, the Pirate attempted to seize my brigantine and was thwarted," said De Silva, in a kindly tone.

"Thank Heaven for that; but was he killed or taken?" she asked, eagerly.

"No, lady, he made his escape; but as the Government officers are to search the vessel, I must ask you to allow me to place you in quarters where you will not be found."

"But, senor, I am anxious to be found."

"True; but the good padre has some motive in wishing you to remain concealed for awhile."

"Remember, he took the pirate crew, had their vessel taken by an American schooner-of-war, and placed you here in safety, so allow him to work out results in his own way."

"I will do as he wishes; but this suspense is fearful to bear."

"It will all come right soon, lady; but now let me place you in a secret hiding-place."

He touched a spring as he spoke, and in one side of the state-room appeared a door.

"Kindly enter, lady," he said to the surprised maiden.

The aperture into which she stepped was a false state-room, the existence of which no one would have suspected.

It was very small, had one bull's-eye light, yet was by no means uncomfortable.

"Why, senor, who would have believed there was a secret state-room here?"

"This vessel seems to me like some old mansion, full of surprises and secret chambers," said Lita.

"Lady, it was built for just such emergencies as now arise; but let me ask you, no matter what sounds you may hear, to keep perfectly silent, as your safety depends on it."

"I will be governed by your wish, senor, as you seem honest toward me."

"I am, lady; good-night, and seek repose."

He closed the secret door behind him as he stepped out of the tiny state-room, and then walked forward.

The pirate crew was concealed in the hold; but De Silva knew that this would be no safe place for them should a search be made, so he went below decks and called out pleasantly:

"Ho, lads!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came in chorus, as the men sprung from their hammocks.

"Lads, a search of this vessel may be made, after the scenes that have occurred on board, and if you are found your necks will stretch, as you know."

"Now, I wish to save you from the yard-arm, and there is a secret hiding-place where I can put you."

"Your quarters will be cramped, but not unpleasant, and I will not keep you there unless it is necessary."

"See here!"

He stepped to the ceiling of the hull and touched a spring.

At once a door flew open, revealing a narrow space within, running along the side of the vessel between the ceiling and the planking of the hull.

The men were amazed.

Stepping across the vessel, he opened another secret door upon the other side, and said:

"Now, lads, I leave these doors open."

"There is room in here for a hundred men, and if I ring this little bell you see hanging here, get your traps and run into these cuddies, and close the doors after you."

"We expect to sail very soon, now, and for the time you are below decks I will give you double pay."

The men gave a murmur of assent, and De Silva took his departure and entered his cabin.

But, contrary to his expectations, no one came to the brigantine, and he threw himself down for a rest.

Arising early, he called his boat alongside and went ashore.

His steps were directed to the inn, and the Senor Amigos greeted him as a good patron.

"You have come to breakfast, I see, captain."

"Well, you shall have the best, so be seated," he said in greeting.

"Anything new, senor?" asked De Silva.

"No, captain."

"Your strange guest, the Wandering Jew, is with you still?"

"Oh, yes, but he kept late hours last night."

"And that young Cræsus, Monte Cristo, is he here yet?"

"Yes, senor."

"Does he keep late hours, too?"

"I do not know at what hour he came in last night, Senor Captain; but I pray the good saints he may not tire of my inn, for a more generous man I never saw."

"After breakfast I would like to see him, if he is willing."

"I will send your name, captain."

De Silva ate his breakfast in silence.

He appeared a trifle nervous, for he was anxious to know if Monte Cristo was dead or alive.

Having sent up his name, soon after a negro servant came to him and said:

"My master, the Senor Monte Cristo, will see Captain de Silva."

The skipper breathed more freely, for Monte Cristo was then alive.

Following the slave he was ushered into a handsomely-furnished ante-chamber, and from thence into a breakfast-room.

A service of solid silver stood upon a table, at which Monte Cristo was seated, with two slaves standing behind his chair.

Rising, as the skipper entered, he said, in his courtly way:

"Senor, be seated, and join me at breakfast, for I have had a plate laid for you."

"Thank you, senor, but I have just breakfasted."

"Then you can have a bottle of what old Amigo calls his best Burgundy," and a goblet of wine was poured out for the skipper, who looked at Monte Cristo in surprise.

He was dressed in a morning suit of velvet, with embroidered smoking-cap and slippers, and looked very little like a man who had so boldly forced his way out of the brigantine, and sprung into the sea, only a few hours before.

"Senor, I have come to ask you to visit the brigantine to-night, in regard to her purchase, that is, if you care to pay a fabulous price for the craft."

"I have made up my mind to purchase the vessel, and will be there," was the calm rejoinder.

"The other person, of whom I spoke to you will be there also, senor, and the matter can be decided to-night; but may I offer my congratulations at seeing you alive this morning, for I feared that you might have lost your life."

"In what way, pray?"

"By springing into the sea."

"Ah, yes, but I am a good swimmer, senor, and knew my own powers."

"I did not see, under the circumstances, the slightest chance to save the vessel, and so I made my escape."

"I am glad that you held the winning hand and saved your vessel."

"Yes, senor, but—" and the skipper glanced at the two slaves present.

"Speak out, senor, for my slaves have no ears—or rather they are absolutely dumb to all that I do not intend they shall hear."

De Silva glanced at the slaves in amazement.

They stood with faces that were utterly impassive, and really seemed not to hear or see.

But, seeing that his visitor had emptied his silver goblet, Monte Cristo said simply:

"Afric, fill the senor's goblet."

One of the slaves sprung to obey, showing how well he heard that which was intended for him to hear.

"Pray continue your remarks, Senor Captain," said Monte Cristo.

"I was about to remark, senor, that I am surprised to know that you are aware the vessel was saved, for it looked dark indeed to you, who was not in my secret."

"The fact is, senor, I had heard of this in-

tended attack upon my vessel, and had arranged accordingly; but I was surprised to find you and the Wandering Jew come out with the pirates."

"It was a trap of the pirates, as I now know, to get possession of the Jew and myself; but I am surprised that you did not hold your prisoners."

"You know then that I did not, senor?"

"Yes."

"Well, senor, there is a mystery about their release, which I cannot myself understand, though I hope to get at the bottom of it all soon."

"But I'll not detain you longer, and will look for you on board to-night."

"I shall be there, Senor Captain," and Monte Cristo arose and bowed low as his visitor departed, strangely impressed with the remarkable man he had just left, and who seemed to know just what had been done on the brigantine, after his departure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MONTE CRISTO'S RESOLVE.

WHEN Monte Cristo bounded from the cabin of the brigantine, he certainly believed that she was in the possession of pirates, as knowing that she had but few men, remembering the suspicious attitude of those who had rowed him out to the vessel, and beholding the crowd that were swarming into the cabin, he could not think otherwise than he did, especially as he was unaware of De Silva's counterplot against Perdido's plot.

Had there been but a few men, Monte Cristo would have remained and aided the skipper and the Jew.

But he saw not an atom of hope for success against the pirates, so made his escape, hurling men like straws from his path.

He had wondered that no great resistance was offered him, but upon reaching the water dove deep, and swam so as to come up near the brigantine.

This he did, and, making his way along her side until he reached her rudder, he climbed upon it and awaited results.

What took place in the cabin he got an inkling of, through the open ports, and was amazed that the Wandering Jew should take part of the pirates and release them.

He had heard that it was Perdido that had made the bold attempt to seize the vessel, and more, that the crew of the lateen-rig was on board the brigantine then, and had sided against their chief and with the skipper.

Perdido was the man who had kidnapped his sister, as he knew, and he wished that he could get to him to wring from him the secret of what he had done with her.

But the crew of the pirate would doubtless know, and from them he would ascertain, while, as for Perdido, knowing him to be in the town in hiding somewhere, he would make every effort to ferret him out.

As he knew that Perdido and his comrades were to be set free, he was anxious to get ashore and track them when they landed, so he dropped down into the water and struck out for land.

The tide, however, was strong against him, and, hampered by his clothing and weapons, as he was, he could not make headway against it, and was carried so far off that he determined to swim to his own craft, which was in the course he was being swept.

Reaching the yacht's side, he readily clambered on board, to the great astonishment of the sailing-master, who was pacing the deck.

"Great Neptune, senor! but you gave me a fright," cried the officer, as, dripping-wet, Monte Cristo appeared suddenly over the side.

Without noticing the remark, Monte Cristo said:

"Ponce, get a boat ready to set me ashore."

"Ay, ay, senor," and the order was given.

"Now, Ponce, I have made an effort to purchase the pretty brigantine, lying at anchor up the harbor, and if my price for her is refused, I intend to have her at any rate."

"How, senor?"

"I shall simply put a sum far more than

she is worth, in the hands of Don Real, the town official, for her, and then cut her out."

"Ah, Senor Monte Cristo, but—"

"Oh, I know what you would say, Ponce, that my act smacks of piracy, and all that; but not if she is paid for far more than her value, and her crew are taken care of."

"The brigantine suits me, and I intend to have her."

"I feared to-night I would lose her, but she is safe now, at least for the present."

"Now, Ponce, I wish you to instruct my spies to keep a closer watch than they do."

"Tell them that I know that Perdido, the Pirate, is in town, and have them watch that old inn yonder, for I believe, in spite of its innocent look, that it is a nest of pirates."

"Yes, senor."

"And, Ponce, bid them keep a close watch upon the brigantine, and the lateen-rigged craft, too, that neither the one or the other gets to sea without my knowing it."

"But the lateen-rig is in charge of an American prize crew, senor."

"True, but for all that a larger pirate crew may board her by night and get to sea in her."

"Yes, senor, I had not thought of that."

"Now I will change my clothing and return to the shore; but remember, Ponce, no one must have a hint of whence we came, whither we go, or when, or that I have any great interest in the search for the padre, or that the captive of the pirates is my sister."

"I will vouch for the few of your people that do know, Senor Monte Cristo, that they will reveal nothing."

"I hope so and believe so, Ponce; but we must be certain, and I will be, if death has to silence the tongue that would betray," was the stern remark of Monte Cristo, as he entered his cabin.

In a short while Ponce entered the cabin and reported the boat ready.

As he stood in the glare of the lamp he was revealed as a bright, intelligent-faced mulatto, with long, waving, jet-black hair hanging upon his shoulders.

He was dressed in a white uniform, trimmed with gold-lace, wore a skull-cap of the same showy material, with a gold tassel hanging over his left ear.

In the blue silk sash that encircled his belt were a pair of gold-mounted revolvers, while a chain suspended a cimetar with a gem-studded hilt.

Being ready, Monte Cristo went on deck and sprung into a small boat awaiting alongside, and with two oarsmen and a coxswain in it.

Those three were negroes, dressed in white duck pants, jackets and skull-caps of the same material, and wearing red silk sashes about their waists.

The boat sped rapidly shoreward through the darkness, and with a pleasant good-night to the crew, Monte Cristo sprung on shore and walked rapidly toward the inn, murmuring:

"I could board the schooner-of-war, inform her handsome young captain what took place, and very quickly solve the matter about the brigantine."

"But I will bide my time, and unfold the mystery myself, and in my own way."

Entering the inn unseen, he sought his room, and at his approaching step the door was flung open by a negro slave, apparently on guard, and who was dressed in white duck pants, blue silk jacket, red silk skull-cap, and a sash of the same scarlet hue, and the color contrasting well with the black face of the negro.

Another slave in the same attire stood at the door of an inner room awaiting his master, and a supper was ready for him.

Partaking lightly of the repast, Monte Cristo sought forgetfulness from the sorrow upon his heart in repose, which he needed after his adventures of the night.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PERDIDO AT WORK.

It must not be thought that Perdido, the Pirate, intended to rest calmly upon his oars, after his defeat in the capture of the brigantine.

The young pirate chief was not that kind of a man, and as soon as he left the brigantine, without losing time in congratulating himself and his officers on their escape from the gallows, he began to plot another scheme to get again afloat.

Pulling the bell-rope, it brought none other than young Jose Diaz, who was rubbing his eyes as though just aroused from slumber.

"Well, senor, this is a surprise, for I thought you had the brigantine," said Jose, truly surprised at seeing the pirate officers again in their old quarters, for he had believed them to have successfully cut out the brigantine.

Having done his part of the work, Jose had returned to the inn and gone to sleep, neither knowing or caring whether Perdido was successful or not.

"No, Jose, I was unsuccessful," answered Perdido.

"And yet saved your neck, senor?"

"Yes; but though I failed to get the brigantine in one way, I have determined to do so in another, and I need your aid."

"You have but to call on me, senor, and I am ready."

"Yes, for gold."

"Yes, senor, for gold."

"Well, you shall have it; but I must see your father, too."

"He has long ago retired."

"It matters not, for my business will not wait."

"I'll call him, senor," and Jose left the room, to soon return accompanied by the landlord of the inn.

It was evident that Jose Diaz, senior, was in no good humor at being disturbed, for he said gruffly:

"Well, senor, what is it so important, as to call a man out of his bed?"

"Becky told me she had let you in, and I knew you had slipped up in your expectations; but what is it now?"

"Just this: my crew did not side with me, as I was led to believe they would, and we merely escaped with our lives."

"There are too many men on the brigantine to attempt to cut her out of this harbor; but I shall cut out my Sea Thief, which only has a dozen men on her, and run her to sea, capture a trader, and lie in wait for the brigantine, which I know will soon sail."

"And do you expect to capture the brigantine with a trading craft?" sneered the incredulous landlord.

"Yes, by strategy."

"Well, you know best; but what can I do?"

"How many men can you get for me in forty-eight hours?"

"How many men does the senor wish?"

"Four-score."

"A large number for so short notice."

"You can get them, and will be well paid; but I am not going to sea light-handed again, and, when I capture the brigantine, I will make these waters too hot for any of the small cruisers now in them, for I am getting revengeful."

"I hope you success, Senor Perdido, and that you may capture the brigantine; but, if you do, don't let that young fellow, Herbert, of the schooner-of-war, Gulf Guard, take her from you, for he certainly will if you attack him."

"I do not fear him."

"Well, look out for him, that is all; but I will get the men for you, and good ones, too."

"I want only good ones, for if any man is afraid to risk his life for gold, then I do not care for him."

"Well, senor, I will set my son here to work, early in the morning, collecting good men, and I have a score or so already lodging with me."

"When do you propose to capture your vessel?"

"The night after next."

"About midnight?"

"Yes, after midnight, for men sleep more soundly then."

"She lies close in under the fort."

"True; but I can cut her out quietly, I think; but if not, must take the chances, for I am determined to have her."

"Would it not be easier to go outside and capture a trader?"

"Perhaps there would be less risk; but I wish to get my pretty Sea Thief out of the

lion's claws, and I will use both vessels, and with them can readily take the schooner-of-war Gulf Guard.

"Then I will have the three fastest vessels afloat, and, now I think of it, I will capture the little yacht now in the harbor which I saw to-night."

"It belongs to the Senor Monte Cristo."

"Yes; then it will not be a bad prize, and it has the appearance of a flyer."

"It looks like a craft I saw some time ago in a little harbor of the Carolinas, where I touched one night; but her paint is not the same, and, as you say she belongs to this rich fellow, Monte Cristo, it cannot be the same one."

"That will give you a fleet of four vessels, senor?"

"Yes; just what I desire."

"You will become a pirate commodore then, Senor Perdido?"

"Yes, for you know the old saying, that one might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb?"

"Yes, senor; but you are cunning enough to keep your head out of the noose, I think."

"I shall not get a rope around my neck, Diaz, if I can prevent it by putting other heads in the noose in place of mine."

"I believe you, even if you had to put mine there to save your own," muttered Jose Diaz, while he added aloud:

"Well, Senor Perdido, I only hope your plans will come out as you wish, and I will do all in my power to help you."

"Come, Jose, let us get rest, for we will have to be up early and get to work for the Senor Perdido and his friends," and the father and son left the room, while Perdido muttered:

"A pirate commodore is not a bad idea indeed."

"Ha! ha! when I get my buccaneer fleet, I will sail for the island and see what my old mother, the Wrecker Witch, thinks of the son she predicted would make a failure as a pirate commander."

"Well, well, once I have my fleet I will keep the Sea Thief, the brigantine and schooner-of-war collecting toll upon the high seas, while the yacht shall cruise in search of that Gold Island no one yet has ever been able to find."

"Ha! ha! ha! Perdido, the star of your destiny is in the ascendant!"

And thus musing, the pirate chief threw himself down to dream of his grand plans for evil.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE JEW AND MONTE CRISTO.

TRUE to his promise, made to the brigantine's skipper, Monte Cristo went on board to meet the one with whom he was to bargain for the pretty craft.

But first he went out to his own yacht, and held a long conversation with Ponce, the mulatto sailing-master.

As he started to go to the brigantine in one boat, Ponce departed in another, and his way was to the schooner-of-war Gulf Guard.

Ponce remained upon the schooner only a short time, and then returned to the yacht; but before he left the side of the Gulf Guard, it was evident that preparations were being made upon that vessel for speedy sailing, if need be, while the crew lay by their guns on deck, and the cable was slipped and the vessel confined only by a rope, which could be cut at a moment's notice.

Returning on board the yacht, Ponce got his negro crew to work in preparing for immediate sailing, too, if necessity should arise for so doing, and she was lightly anchored fore and aft, in a position for darting away at once, when her sails were set, and so headed that she could run across the bows of any vessel going to sea.

Having made his arrangements, Ponce took his stand astern, and with his glass at his eye, watched the brigantine.

By these preparations on board of the schooner and the yacht, it looked as though Monte Cristo suspected treachery, and was going to thwart it by being prepared for any emergency that might occur.

In the mean time Monte Cristo had rowed out to the brigantine, in the shore-boat he

had started in, and as he touched the side he heard the hail of the officer on deck to another boat that was coming near.

He was met on deck by the skipper himself, who immediately said:

"One minute, Senor Monte Cristo, until I receive the Wandering Jew, and we will adjourn to the cabin."

Monte Cristo bowed in silence, and a moment after the three men were in the handsome cabin of the brigantine.

"Senors, be seated, and let me help you to wine," politely said the skipper, and he poured out three silver goblets of wine.

"Senor Captain, I admire greatly the chasing upon these very beautiful goblets."

"Ah! they are different, I see— Permit me, senor, and pardon my curiosity," and Monte Cristo took up first the goblet of the Wandering Jew, and then that of Captain De Silva.

The Wandering Jew cast an interested look also at the silver goblets, and as Monte Cristo replaced the three after greatly admiring them, he muttered to himself:

"Well, he was suspects somethings, for he was take mine goblets, give me t'e skipper's goblets, and take t'e skipper's goblets for himself."

"Vell, vell! he was a pooty smart mans, dat was so."

If De Silva also noticed this clever change of the goblets by Monte Cristo he did not show it, but said simply:

"Your good health, senors."

Monte Cristo drank his wine with seeming relish, smilingly commenting upon its worth, but the skipper merely tasted his, and the Wandering Jew barely touched it to his lips.

"I was pe smarts also pretty quick, he muttered."

"Well, senors, I might as well come to business, and say frankly that I arranged this meeting on board the brigantine, that something might be decided regarding the purchase of the brigantine," said the skipper, coming at once to business.

"Dat was so, mine fri'nt, for I vill pay t'e brigantine, and I vill pay pig monish for her," the Jew remarked, as innocently as though she was not in reality his vessel.

"And I, too, desire to purchase the brigantine, Senor Captain, and will pay her price," calmly remarked Monte Cristo.

"Well, senors, last night's experience, when you met here, shows how much the craft is coveted, and I confess I am anxious to have her off my hands ere the pirates take her from me, as I fear they will."

"Now, she was built to sell, and I assure you she cost me double what you might suppose, as every timber in her is perfect, and she has advantages about her that no other vessel has, and which I will make known to the purchaser."

"Besides this, she is as stiff as a frigate in a gale, and can outsail any craft I ever saw, or expect to see."

"Now, senors, I have given you the refusal of her, but have many other offers, and wish to ask you if you still desire to pay the very generous sum offered me?" and the skipper turned to the Wandering Jew, who said somewhat eagerly:

"Yes, mine fri'nt, I pays you t'e monish pretty quick."

"May I ask the amount?" Monte Cristo said.

"It was the very remarkable sum of one hundred and fifth thousand pesos," answered De Silva, and he looked at Monte Cristo in a way that showed he expected to startle him.

But Monte Cristo did not change countenance, and said with the utmost calmness:

"It is a large price, a fabulous price for the vessel, Senor Skipper; but I have determined to buy her, although I am sorry to have to compete with the gentleman here; but I offer you ten thousand advance upon the sum named."

The Jew's eyes sparkled as he said:

"And I makes it ten thousand more, mine fri'nt."

"As it seems to be a question of the highest bidder becoming the purchaser, I—"

"It is just that, senor, the highest priced man gets the brigantine," said De Silva.

"Then I offer two hundred thousand pesos," Monte Cristo remarked, as calmly as though he had spoken of an ordinary sum.

The Wandering Jew started to his feet at this; but resuming his seat, cried eagerly:

"I makes twenty-five thousands more upon that sums."

"And allow me to add another twenty-five thousand to the offer just made."

Both the skipper and the Jew were astounded; but Monte Cristo continued in his quiet way:

"Senors, this bidding is useless, for we can readily decide the matter by my saying I will put another fifty to that, for, as I told you, *I am determined to have the brigantine.*"

The Jew sat in silent astonishment, and after glancing at him, De Silva waited for him to speak; but he remained silent, and the skipper said:

"Well, Senor Monte Cristo, the brigantine is your vessel."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE JEW'S SECRET.

WHEN the skipper uttered the words, giving the brigantine to Monte Cristo, the Wandering Jew seemed to be recalled to himself, out of some deep thought, for he cried earnestly:

"No! no! no! I vill gives more for t'e prigantines."

"You are too late, senor, for the vessel is mine."

"There is your valuation, Senor Captain," and Monte Cristo tossed a bag of gems upon the table.

"But I offers more as that," urged the Jew.

For a moment De Silva seemed undecided what to do.

He saw that the Jew was playing a part to make Monte Cristo pay still more for the vessel, while the sum already agreed upon was fabulous in the extreme, and far more than either of them expected would be realized.

Still the craft belonged to the Jew, and if he could make Monte Cristo pay more, he would do so.

So De Silva said:

"Senor Monte Cristo, the senor here offers more."

"It matters nothing to me, senor, what he now offers."

"He had a fair chance to bid against me, and after my last offer he remained silent, and you sold me the vessel, so she is mine."

"But, senor, I vas—"

"Pardon, senor, but I will listen no argument in this matter, for I offered a price for this craft which was accepted."

"It is not a question of money, for I would have given a million for her had it been necessary; but the Senor Captain has sold her to me at my last offer, and I intend to allow no interference from you, or derelict act upon his part toward me."

The Jew and the skipper stared at each other in utter amazement.

Here was a man who frankly confessed that he would have given an enormous fortune for the vessel, and yet, his offer having been accepted, he would stand no trifling.

Both of the plotters were nonplused at having been foiled, and when they gazed upon the tall, handsome, fearless man before them, as he stood by the table, his face calm, but eyes flashing, they saw he was not one to trifle with.

Then the Jew spoke up and said:

"Vell, senors, I vas disappointed, for I wants t'e prigantine; put t'e skipper have sait that she vas sold, so I vas say not'ings more, only I wants a poats vera mooch."

"There are other vessels for sale, senor," calmly said Monte Cristo.

"That vas so, mine fri'nt, but t'ey vas not t'e prigantine; but you vas do me von favor, don't you, mine fri'nt?"

"In what way can I serve you, senor?"

"You vas knows t'e young captains of t'e Goolf Guards?"

"I do."

"Vell, he has t'e lateen pirate craft mit his powers?"

"Yes, senor."

"She vas a prize?"

"So I believe, senor."

"Vell, von't you puy her for me?"

"Why not do so yourself, senor?"

"Maype he don't vas sells her to me, mine fri'nt; put I vas pay you von pig monish for t'e vessel."

Monte Cristo eyed the Jew as though he would look down into his very heart; but the look was fearlessly met.

Then he said:

"Senor, may I ask to what use you wish to put that vessel?"

"Yesh, mine fri'nt, I vas vant to makes von cruise in her."

"Pardon me, but where, and under what circumstances?"

"You vas von honest gentlemen, mine fri'nt?"

"No man dare tell me to the contrary, senor."

"Then I vas tell you von secrets?"

"If you confide in me, I will not betray you, and I suppose you will know best whether to trust the senor here or not," and Monte Cristo looked at the skipper, who said bluntly:

"Well, senor, you come right out in what you say."

"I utter no word behind a man's back, Senor Captain, that I will not repeat to his face."

"Vell, I vill trust t'e captains, too, for I vas vant him to pe my captains."

"Now, senors, I vas have blenty of monish, golt, diamonts and other gems; but I vas vant more as dem, and vas knows somedings apout von islangs of golt that vas lost long times ago mit blenty of golt on it—you understands, mine fri'nt?"

Monte Cristo bowed, and De Silva said:

"Yes, I have heard of that island, and folks say a pirate craft was wrecked there, and the treasure buried, but all hands died, excepting one, and he made his escape, but went mad and could never find his way back there again, so that the gold, precious stones and booty are still there."

"Yesh, that vash so, and I vas want to find t'e islangs."

"I vas got blenty, as I vas said, put I vas wants more, and, as I vas a Vandering Jew mit t'e Sea, and have no homes, I vas take mine golt on poard t'e ships and looks for t'e islangs."

"This vas my secrets, mine fri'nt, and vy I wants t'e other vessel, now that you vas puy's t'e prigantines."

"Well, senor, as you have been frank with me, so I will be with you, and tell you that the lateen rig was offered to me by Captain Herbert, he intending to sell her as a prize."

"But I preferred the brigantine, although at such a fabulous price, and you can purchase the pirate craft if you will go on board of the schooner Gulf Guard in the morning, and make a good offer for her."

"Now, Senor Captain, if you are a judge of precious stones, and will select from them the price of your vessel, I will take my departure, but return to-morrow to take possession of my vessel."

"She will be ready for you, senor, by noon, and—"

"No, I would prefer to come on board with my crew after nightfall, if agreeable to you."

"Perfectly so, senor," and De Silva counted the gems until he got his price for the brigantine, and said:

"I am satisfied, senor."

Monte Cristo simply bowed, and turning to the Jew, said:

"Senor, as it is still early, I will accompany you on board the schooner-of-war to see Captain Herbert, to whom I desire to report my purchase of the brigantine."

The Wandering Jew looked as though he desired to remain; but having no excuse which he could give to Monte Cristo for so doing, he glanced at De Silva in a knowing way, and arose from his seat.

The skipper saw the look, and interpreted it rightly, for it read:

"Remember, you have a large fortune belonging to me, and I am compelled to trust you, not being able to do otherwise."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TEMPTATION AND WARNING.

CAPTAIN DE SILVA saw his guests depart on their way to the schooner-of-war, and watched them until they disappeared from sight up the harbor.

"Well," he muttered, "I suppose I will have to be captain of the lateen-rig now, and give up the brigantine; but it will not be for

long, as, when I know just what this Jew is after, I shall give up the sea and settle down to a life of enjoyment."

"But I believe this old Jew really knows where this Gold Island is, and I will get a large sum if I stick to him; but if he does not know that, he is up to some game, I am sure, and I will see that I am well paid for my services."

With this remark he returned to the cabin, and his eyes fell upon the bags of gems which, with strange forgetfulness, he had left upon the table.

Eagerly he sat down and looked over them.

The skipper was a good judge of precious stones, and he ran over the values again, until he said:

"Well, he was not mean, this Monte Cristo, for he gave me over value; but what does he want with the brigantine, to pay such a price for her?"

"Ha! I had forgotten the gems paid me by the Jew, so will look them over, too."

He arose, and placing his hands above his head, touched the ornamented ceiling.

Instantly a panel let down, displaying upon the inner side a few drawers.

From one of these he took a small purse, and a large bag from another.

Then he closed the panel, and locking the companionway door, returned to his seat.

"My heavens! what a fortune is here!" he cried eagerly, gloating over the gems which he emptied from the purse and bag.

Then he poured the gold out upon the table, and sat gazing in silent rapture at all.

"That gold was my fortune when I came here with the brigantine."

"Now look: I have the one hundred and fifty thousand the Jew paid me for the vessel, and he will have to share with me the amount I have made on the craft to-night."

"That will make me a very rich man—richer than ever I believed I ever could be."

He was silent for a few minutes, his fingers meanwhile nervously playing with the gems.

Suddenly he started, and his face became pale, while he arose to his feet like one urged by some strong impulse which he could not resist.

"Great God! what thought is this that has crowded upon me?"

"It says to me:

"Why share with the Jew, for you have all!"

"How strange that I am thus tempted."

"And yet, I am nothing but a pirate, after all."

"A pirate, yes, and with a fortune to tempt me."

"See! here are the gems the Jew paid me, and here are those Monte Cristo gave me—truly a great fortune."

"There are a few thousands in gold, and besides, *I have the brigantine!*"

He began to pace to and fro with nervous step, his lips the while muttering aloud:

"The brigantine, too, I have."

"Ha! ha! ha! I am in luck, and was ever man so tempted?"

"And more, could an honest man ever resist the temptation?"

"I certainly cannot, being a pirate."

"See! I have a fortune there on that table, and I have the brigantine."

"The latter is the fastest craft afloat, as I well know, and why should I not keep her?"

"Ay, and also cruise in search of the lost Treasure Island?"

"There is hardly a sailor but has heard of the island, and I might as well search for it as the Jew."

"Ay, and I will."

"If I do not find it, I will give it up and enjoy the fortune that I have."

"I have a good crew on board, plenty of guns and small-arms hidden away, and can cruise where I please, and protect myself, though I will not turn pirate."

"No, the risk is too great, so I will become only a gold-hunter of the sea."

"As for the Jew, he will go mad when he knows I have run off with his money, and he will doubtless come in search of me in the lateen-rig; but I can laugh at all pursuers in this craft."

"Monte Cristo, too, will be furious at the

trick I serve him, and he, too, will doubtless wish to hunt me down.

"And he is a dangerous man, and one I will have to fear, for wronging him; but then he is very rich and will not care for the money, though the loss of the brigantine will be a bitter blow to him.

"Still, I must take my chances, and I will.

"Ay, this very night will I set sail, and by noon to-morrow I will stand on an armed deck, with my crew about me.

"Ha! how about the young girl?

"Ah me! what must I do with her?

"That padre left her here, and for what reason?

"The Jew said she was to still remain a captive, and she had, meanwhile, won my love.

"How strangely like she is to that young Monte Cristo, and what a romance it would be, could he rescue her and make her his wife, though she is enough like him to be his own sister.

"Well, such likenesses occur now and then.

"Well, I love her, for she brings back to me one I idolized in the long ago, and one who, had she lived, would have kept me from becoming a pirate.

"Thank Heaven, she knew not what I was to be, for, as it broke the heart of my poor old mother, and placed her in her grave, when she knew her boy was a pirate, it would have killed poor Lucy, too.

"But Heaven took her from me, and I am what I am.

"Bah! I must not dwell on the past, or I will become honest.

"No, I will live for the future.

"But the girl! the girl!" and again his thoughts reverted to the poor captive, who, in her secret state-room, little dreamed that her brother had been so near her a short while before.

"Well, I love her," said De Silva, resuming his musings half-aloud.

"Yes, I love her devotedly, and I will ask her to be my wife.

"I will tell her that I saved her from becoming a pirate's bride, and beg her to marry me, and we will land at a port near and get a priest to perform the ceremony.

"If she refuses, well then, for the sake of poor Lucy, dead those fifteen years, I will do one good act and restore her to her home.

"But now to get my crew on deck, hoist the anchor, spread sail, and fly from this port and become a wanderer of the seas.

"Ha! ha! ha! De Silva, you are in luck, for a fortune is in your hands, a grand vessel beneath your feet, a beautiful girl at hand for you to win as a bride, and life before you, the past, with all its memories, its guilt, its regrets and its sorrows behind you.

"Ay, ay, De Silva, keep the past in your wake, and look ahead that you run on no breakers, for now not one shadow rises to dim your pathway, no ill-omen comes up to frighten you, and you can snap your fingers at your foes, for the winds will waft you wheresoe'er you list, and joy will be your bondsman— *Oh, God have mercy! What is that?*"

The words broke from the lips of the man in almost a shriek, and dropping upon his knees, with clasped hands, as though in prayer, his eyes were riveted upon one of the stern-ports where had appeared that which had caused the utterance of his cry of terror.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BLACK IMP.

WHEN Monte Cristo and the Wandering Jew reached the schooner-of-war Gulf Guard, they found the handsome young commander of that very energetic little vessel in his cabin.

Monte Cristo introduced the old Israelite in a very few terse words, saying:

"Captain Herbert, allow me to present to you a gentleman, whom I know only as men call him, the Wandering Jew of the Sea.

"I overbid the gentleman for the brigantine to-night, and, as he desired a vessel, suggested that he visit you in regard to the purchase of your pirate prize, the lateen-rig."

Captain Herbert greeted Monte Cristo

warmly, and bowed to the Jew, while he said:

"I will sell the lateen-rig, if I get a good price for her, as I desire to pay off my crew; but I must know that she is not going into any service that is illegal."

"Of that, sir, I cannot speak, so would refer you to the gentleman who desires to make the purchase."

"Vell, mine fri'nt, I vas tell you," began the Jew, seeing that it devolved upon him to speak.

"You see I vas a rich mans, and I vas robbed on shore, so I vas vant to take my riches on poard t'e vessels, so as not to have 'em stealed from me.

"I will give you t'e price of t'e prize, vat you ask, and I vas say I vas von honest man, a Hebrew vat does no harm mit nopodys."

"I do not doubt but that you are all right, sir, for I never yet met a Jew that was a sea pirate, no matter what they are ashore, and you can have the vessel for twenty thousand."

"I vas tickled so mooch I vas pay you pretty quick, Senor Captains.

"Here vas monish that vas goot," and the Jew began hastily to count out the money.

Captain Herbert smiled at his earnestness, and when he saw that the amount was correct, said:

"Well, senor, you have a good vessel, for she is new, stanch and fleet; but she has been in bad business, and I hope not to catch her at such red work again."

"Never, senor, so help me t'e Got of Abraham.

"She vas carry guns, but vas von peaceful craft, and I only has t'e pull-dogs and t'e crews to fight t'e pirates.

"Maype I gets t'e vessel to-morrow nights?"

"Sooner if you wish."

"No, I vill go on poard mit my crews to-morrow nights, senor, and I vas thank you."

Captain Herbert bowed, and turning to Monte Cristo, said:

"So you have bought the brigantine, senor?"

"Yes, Captain Herbert."

"I'll warrant that Yankee skipper made you pay a large sum for her."

"I paid three hundred thousand pesos, Captain Herbert," said Monte Cristo, quietly.

But Captain Herbert did not take the news quietly, and was on his feet in an instant.

"Do you mean it, senor?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Why, you could buy a line-of-battle ship for that sum."

"True, but a line-of-battle ship would not suit my purpose."

"Senor Monte Cristo, you are indeed in earnest in the work you contemplate."

"I am in earnest in all I do, sir, and trebly so in the matter I have on hand, and of which you know.

"I saw the brigantine and was determined to have her, and now that she is mine, I shall soon put her to good use, so do not be surprised if the pretty vessel sails at any hour from the harbor.

"In what you do, Senor Monte Cristo, I wish you success, and you certainly deserve it after the investment you have made in the brigantine.

"Some day I may run across you at sea, and then we will try and find out just what you can do with the Gulf Guard, which I believe has very few equals in speed."

"T'e lateen-rig vas a very goot poat, too," put in the Jew.

"Yes, fully as fleet as the Gulf Guard, though neither, I judge, could catch the brigantine under the most favorable circumstances.

"Have you named your vessel yet, Senor Monte Cristo?"

"I shall call her the Water Wolf, sir, for no wolf shall be more ferocious, or hang more determinedly upon a trail than she, once she has set sail on the duty she has to perform."

Monte Cristo spoke with an earnestness that was almost savage, and which caused the Jew to ask:

"Vell, mine fri'nt, vat vas t'e duties that t'e prigantine vas have to do?"

Monte Cristo turned upon him almost angrily; but checking himself, answered quietly:

"To hunt down a foe, senor."

"Vas dat so? Vell, I was hopes you catch him."

"Thank you, senor, I intend to; but Captain Herbert I am making you a long visit, so will take my departure, hoping you will do me the honor of breakfasting with me in the morning."

"With pleasure, senor," was the answer, and the Wandering Jew also rising, the two visitors took their departure.

The Jew landed with Monte Cristo, but soon after left him, under some pretext, and rapidly walked back to the landing.

There he found a boat, and, springing into it, seized the oars.

As he did so he felt the boat shake violently, and turning, beheld over the bow an object that caused him to give a sudden yell of fright and bound out into the water, and then to the shore.

But, turning, as soon as he could recollect himself, he said:

"Mine Got! it vas t'e devil sure."

But nowhere did he see the hideous object that had flashed upon him so suddenly, and a wait of long minutes failed to reveal it again.

Shaking his head in a way that showed he was in a quandary, he once more returned to the boat, seized the oars, and sent it flying away from the shore.

For awhile he turned his head constantly, as though expecting to again see the object which had so startled him, but it did not reappear, and he soon ran alongside of the brigantine.

The man on deck was Mattocks, and he told the Jew that he thought that the captain had retired.

To their surprise, they found the companionway locked, and glancing through the glass they beheld the skipper lying prostrate upon the floor.

Hastening through the wardroom, the Jew entered the cabin, and at first believed that the skipper was dead.

He had told Mattocks to remain, saying that he would go alone, and feeling the pulse of the prostrate man, he found that he lived.

After a few moments he restored him to consciousness, and the skipper sat up and gazed around him in a scared, bewildered way.

"Where is it?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Vere ish vat, mine fri'nt?"

"Jew, is that you?"

"It ish me, mine fri'nt, put you don't vas seems like you."

"You are not the devil, then?" and the skipper shuddered.

"Mine fri'nt, I guesses that you vas gone mad, for I vas not t'e devils, put a Jewish gentlemans."

"But I saw the devil."

"You vas sees him?" and the Jew gave an anxious look behind him.

"I did, Senor Jew."

"Vere vas he?"

"In that open port."

"No."

"I tell you yes, for I was here at my table, counting my share of the money, when into that stern port-hole looked the devil.

"I tell you, senor, I tried to pray, but it was no use, and I just went over on my beam-ends, and that is all I know.

"But, tell me, are the jewels all there?" he added, quickly.

"Dere vas blenty of 'em, senor."

"Thank God, the devil didn't take the gems."

"Vat vas your devils like, my fri'nt?"

"He was black as ebony, wild eyed, had tusks, and oh! such a savage face."

The Jew started.

"Mine fri'nt, I vas sees t'e same devils, and he vas scare me von leetle, too; but he vas gone ashore now, so let us talk pizziness as it vas petter as ve takes t'e lateen-rig to-night."

"You saw the devil, too?" and the skipper glared upon the Jew.

"Yes, mine fri'nt, put he vas gone."

"What was he like, senor?"

"He vas a plack imp, as you vas says; put it is pizziness now."

"What business?" asked the skipper, his thoughts still upon the black imp he had seen in the stern port, and whose appearance had upset all of his plans.

"I vas want to take t'e prize to-night."

"Take her?"

"I vas pought her mit my monish, and I vas say I wants her to-morrow night; put I vill send t'e man Mattocks to t'e captains of t'e schooner, vid a crew of mans, and say I vill take her pretty quick to-night, and then ve take t'e crews and t'e lady girl captive on poard and sail pretty quick."

"As you please, senor, for I am under your orders," said the skipper, in a disconsolate tone.

"Yes, and ve vill now tevide t'e monish for t'e brigantine, and I vas ask t'e American captains to let his crew that vas on t'e pirate prize, come here until t'e Senor Monte Cristo vas want her."

"Yes, senor; but I made a good bargain for the brigantine, did I not?"

"You vas make a pig pargain, mine fri'nt, put it vas a mistake that ve did not vas make it pigger as it vas."

"It's your money to me back again, senor, and as much more in your pocket, and the same in mine."

"Ah! you vas tevide it that vay, vas you, mine fri'nt?"

"Very goot, it shall pe so," and the Jew hastily took his share, and then sent Mattocks to tell the captain of the schooner-of-war that he would at once take possession of his purchase.

A favorable answer came back, and then the captive was taken from the secret state-room and placed in a boat, and the crew in hiding followed her.

Just as the two boats had departed under command of Mattocks, and the Jew and the skipper, with a few men, were awaiting the arrival of the crew from the prize to take charge of the brigantine, a boat came swiftly alongside.

"Here ish t'e peoples to take care mit t'e brigantine, Senor Skipper, so ve vill go," said the Jew.

"Monte Cristo is here to take charge of his vessel, Senor Jew," was the stern response, and Monte Cristo sprung upon the deck and confronted the Jew and the skipper.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MONTE CRISTO AFLOAT.

THE Jew and the skipper both started at sight of Monte Cristo as though they had been caught doing some evil act.

The request had been made to Captain Herbert to allow the crew then on the prize to take charge of the brigantine until Monte Cristo took possession, and seeing the boat coming, they had believed it to be from the vessel to which they were then going.

The skipper, and the Jew, too, seemed a trifle nervous, for they knew they had to risk getting the pirate crew on board the Sea Thief without being seen, while Lita also had to be concealed, and deceived also into changing from the brigantine.

Little did the two men dream that their captive was the sister of Monte Cristo, a man whom, for some reason, they dreaded.

Therefore, when he suddenly boarded the brigantine, both the Jew and the skipper were momentarily taken aback.

"Ah, senor, I am glad to see you, for the senor here, having made me sailing-master of his new purchase, and taking possession of her to-night, we had asked Captain Herbert to place his crew on board to await your coming," said Captain De Silva in a quick, nervous way.

"Thank you, senor, but knowing of your intention to board your vessel to-night, I determined to myself come out to the brigantine, and have told Captain Herbert I would not trouble him," and the words of Monte Cristo made both the Jew and the skipper feel uncomfortable, for how had he found out their intention?

"Yes, we thought it vas petter to move to-night, senor," put in the Jew.

"Well, I wish you joy in your vessel, senor, and you certainly have a large crew, which, if you take my advice, you will still keep hidden, as their presence might cause unpleasant rumors."

"Now, Senor Captain, I must ask you to show me the secret ins and outs of my beautiful vessel," and Monte Cristo turned to the skipper, who at once replied:

"With pleasure, senor, if you will come with me."

Monte Cristo turned to the side and said:

"Ponce, come on board with six of your men and take charge."

"Yes, senor," was the response of the mulatto, and, with his shipmates, he sprung upon the deck with the agility of cats.

"Now, senor," and Monte Cristo followed the skipper into the cabin, the Jew also starting, but coming to a sudden halt at the words:

"Pardon, senor; but your skipper, I believe, is to show me some secrets connected with this vessel, known only to himself, he so informs me, and which I desire no one else than myself to know."

Entering the cabin, the skipper first showed the secret panel in the ornamental ceiling, and a trap in the flooring, the existence of which no one would suspect.

Going forward between-decks, the skipper displayed one secret that both surprised and delighted Monte Cristo.

This was that in the berth deck there was a double, or false, flooring, and the planks were taken out by secret springs, revealing a number of splendid heavy guns, with carriages and tackle all complete, snugly arranged therein, and which could readily be sent up through the hatch to the deck above.

In other spaces were small-arms of all kinds, and next the cuddies where the crew had been put in hiding.

"You have a most remarkable vessel, senor, I assure you," said Monte Cristo, more than pleased with his bargain.

"Yes, senor; the brigantine is a beauty and a wonder."

"Why, you can store your guns and small-arms, hide four-fifths of your crew, and sail into any port as a merchant craft, while the closest search of the Government officers will not be able to detect anything wrong."

"The vessel is perfect, senor, and if pleased now, as you are, when you see her sail in a good breeze, you will pronounce her the best craft afloat on any sea."

"I can readily believe you, Senor De Silva, and I thank you for your kindness, so will not detain you longer from your friends," and the two returned to the deck, where they found the Wandering Jew in earnest conversation with Ponce, the mulatto, and to whom he had said, after his rebuff by Monte Cristo:

"Vell, mine fri'nt, you vas a slave mans, don't you?"

"I was, senor, but my master set me free."

"Ah! vas that so?"

"Vell, what vas your master v'en he vas home?"

"A gentleman, senor."

"So! vell, v'ere vas his homes?"

"At sea."

"Mine gootness! does he vas lives at sea all t'e times?"

"His home was upon the ocean, senor."

"Vell, vell! and so vas mine, for I vas named t'e Vandering Jew mit t'e Sea."

"So I have heard, senor."

"Vas t'e Senor Monte Cristo very rich, mine fri'nt?"

"Yes, senor."

"Vere he vas got his monish?"

"He inherited it, senor."

"Vas dat so? Vell, I vas give you five hundred pesos for you tells me all I wants to know."

"About what, senor?"

"The Senor Monte Cristo."

"And he would give a hundred thousand pesos if I needed money, senor, to be faithful to him, and a knife in my heart, a bullet in my brain, if I was not true to him."

"Vell, vell! that vas pretty quick work, mine fri'nt; put I vas give you goot evenings, mine fri'nt," and the latter was said in a loud tone, as Monte Cristo and the skipper came on deck.

"Now, senor, I must ask you and the captain to join me in a bottle of wine, to the success of your voyage and mine," and Monte Cristo led the way into the cabin, and the skipper showed Ponce where the wine was kept.

The goblets were filled and quickly emptied, and then the Jew and the skipper took their departure, leaving Monte Cristo sole master of the beautiful vessel, that looked so

peaceable lying at anchor there, yet could readily be made to show her teeth if need be.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DUEL AT THE INN.

FEELING confident that the Jew was a mysterious personage, who would well bear watching, Monte Cristo had quietly followed him, after they had parted, and thus had discovered that the change was to be made from the brigantine to the Sea Thief that night.

Of course the Jew had a perfect right to make the change, having purchased the vessel; but Monte Cristo could not understand what he wanted with the large pirate crew he then had hiding on board the brigantine.

Going to his yacht he had gotten Ponce and eight of his negro seamen, and lay off upon the waters, watching the departure of the boats containing the men.

He had seen them leave and at once row to the schooner-of-war, and told Captain Herbert that the Jew was taking possession of his new purchase, but he made no allusion to the pirate crew he had in hiding, determined to watch the craft, and if he saw any intention to turn her into a pirate, to then act.

Henry Herbert had told Monte Cristo how the Jew had already sent word on board, and there was, after so doing, seemingly nothing suspicious in his making the change so late at night, and sooner than he anticipated.

Returning to the brigantine he had reached there, as the reader has seen, before the departure of the Wandering Jew and the skipper.

Leaving Ponce in charge of the brigantine, and another faithful slave on the yacht, Monte Cristo went ashore, passing as he did so, a small group of men standing near the landing.

One of these men was none other than Perdido the Pirate, the very man who had stolen poor Lita from her home, and whom he would have given his right hand to meet.

"That man was Monte Cristo," muttered Perdido, as the young sailor passed on.

"Yes, senor," answered Jose Diaz, junior, who was one of the party.

"I have half a mind to attack him, disarm him, and carry him a prisoner on board the Sea Thief."

"Better not try it, senor, for he is a bad man," said the cautious Jose.

"Do you not think my disguise perfect?"

"Yes, senor."

"And no one would know me?"

"It would be impossible, senor."

"Then I will leave my officers here to await your father, and you come with me, and I'll show you how I can handle the great Monte Cristo."

"You wish no mistake to occur to-night, senor?"

"And none will occur, Jose."

"Senor, you must remember that to-morrow night your plan was to be carried out; but as you have decided to act to-night, the men will soon be ready, and my father will not like finding you gone when he comes back to report."

"Bah! we will be gone but a few minutes, so come along."

If there was anything that young Jose Diaz liked, it was a row.

He doted on a sword combat, and he had heard that Perdido was a superb swordsman, and that Monte Cristo was otherwise he could not doubt.

Under other circumstances, he would have tried to fan a trouble; but he did not wish to miss his gold in aiding Perdido to get to sea.

But, thus urged as he was, he could not resist, and the two hastened on after Monte Cristo, and soon found him at the Anchor Inn.

Perdido wore the suit of a Spanish cavalier but had hidden his head and face under a blonde wig and beard, which was in striking contrast to his dark eyes.

Entering the tap-room, while Jose hung back a little, Perdido attracted no slight attention, for he was a very handsome man, and all saw that he was a stranger.

At one table were a number of American naval officers from the Gulf Guard, and Monte Cristo had just taken his seat among them and called for a bottle of wine.

Perdido felt confident in his disguise, and wishing to lose no time, and anxious to humiliate Monte Cristo, whom all seemed to revere, he walked across the room and said in polite tones:

"Pardon me, senors, but are you aware that that man is Perdido the pirate?"

He addressed the American officers and pointed at Monte Cristo as he spoke.

It was such a bold assertion, and seemingly so frankly made, that all present sprung to their feet, and Jose, from his point of observation muttered:

"Sainted Apostles! but that fellow has nerve; but we'll watch the ending."

As for Monte Cristo he did not move, or even change color at this bold charge.

He swiftly glanced into the face of his accuser, and said in his deep, stern voice:

"Senor, you are an utter stranger to me, but I pledge you, if you do not prove your words, we shall be intimately acquainted within five minutes."

"Do you deny my charge, senor, that you are Perdido the pirate?" asked Perdido, with the utmost effrontery.

"These gentlemen know me as I am, sir, so I need not deny aught to them; but, as your motive seems to pick a quarrel with me, for some reason, I will not allow you to go without an excuse, or be disappointed."

With the last word, quick as a flash of light, Monte Cristo gave Perdido a ringing slap in the face.

The blow sounded loudly, and half-stunned Perdido; but, only for an instant, and then, maddened, he drew a stiletto and sprung upon his enemy.

But Monte Cristo, with a strength that was amazing, seized the arm of the disguised pirate, and wrung it until a cry of pain was forced from his lips and he was forced to drop his knife to the floor.

Stepping back quickly, Monte Cristo said coolly:

"Senor, only a coward uses a knife, and you wear a sword as well as I."

Perdido had met his match, he well knew, as far as strength was concerned, for he had felt himself as a child in the grip of the man he had sought to humiliate.

But, with a sword he felt that he was on more equal terms, and, furious at his defeat, he would not listen to reason, which dictated a withdrawal from the combat, but said:

"Ay, Sir Pirate, if you desire to cross blades with me, so be it."

He quickly drew his sword, and Monte Cristo, with a word of apology to his friends, did the same.

"Senors—senors, this must not occur in my house!" cried Amigos, whom Jose, with a chuckle at Perdido's defeat, and fears for a worse one, had urged to go forward and stop the encounter.

"It will last but a moment, good Amigos, and I will clear your house of that rubbish," said Monte Cristo, and with his words Perdido sprung forward to the attack, while Amigos, unwilling to anger so good a patron as was Monte Cristo, fell back, and with the others present, a score in number, looked on.

Monte Cristo met the onslaught of Perdido in a way that at once put that handsome young pirate upon his guard and his mettle, for his thrust was skillfully parried and as quickly did the point of his blade gash the cheek of the insulter.

"A little blood-letting will cool you, senor, and at the same time leave my mark upon you," said Monte Cristo with the utmost calmness, and then, seeing that Perdido was growing wild with rage, he disarmed him with a skill that was the admiration of all.

"Senor, leave the good blade which you have disgraced, and depart at once from beneath this roof!"

Monte Cristo pointed, as he spoke, with his sword to the door, and Perdido wheeled and left, but turned back as he neared the portal.

"This is not our last meeting, Sir Pirate!"

"As you please, senor; I can always be found."

Then the portal closed upon the defeated pirate, and Jose hastened him along, while he muttered:

"Senor, that man just played with you."

"Curse him! One day it will be my

turn— Hark! there is a shout as though we were followed— Hal! we are, for my sword bore my name, and they have seen it.

"Come, Jose! for my life I must fly," and Perdido bounded away like a deer, Jose keeping pace with him, and leading the way through the dark streets toward the harbor.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SCENE UPON THE WATERS.

PERDIDO, the Pirate, was a strange combination of contradictions in his character, if character he possessed.

He was not a brave man, as was De Silva and the Wandering Jew, not to speak of one whose courage was wonderful, Monte Cristo; but Perdido was not exactly a coward.

He took chances when the chance favored him.

He had wonderful confidence in his own powers, and yet on board the brigantine, the reader will remember, had been mastered by the Wandering Jew.

Still he possessed great physical power, and also skill as a swordsman, and had been utterly amazed that the Jew had proven so readily his master.

With this spirit of self-confidence, he had gone to the inn to meet Monte Cristo, and against the wishes of that remarkably foresighted youth, Jose Diaz, junior.

Had Monte Cristo so wished, he could have readily run him through, and this did Perdido realize, as well as the young Jose.

"Two men my superiors, both in strength and with the blade," he had murmured, disconsolately, as he went along.

Finding that he was evidently discovered, through the name which he had foolishly had engraven on his sword-hilt, he fled for his life, and Jose readily kept him company.

Arriving at the landing, they found Jose, senior, awaiting there with the officers, who had told him of their captain's intention of going to the inn.

Jose Diaz was in a towering rage, and hissed forth:

"Fool! go and give your own life away if you wish, but do not put the necks of others in the noose."

"Come into the boat, for your crew are ready and await you out upon the water."

Perdido was too much alarmed for his safety, to take exceptions to the language of his landlord, so he hastily got into the boat in waiting, and it sped out over the dark waters.

"Senor Perdido, your men await you in two boats yonder, and there are just thirty of them."

"You know where the lateen craft lies at anchor, and there are on board just thirteen men, one of whom is the midshipman in charge," said Jose Diaz.

"And the rest of my crew?"

"Are down the harbor, in the swift-sailing trading craft which I purchased for you."

"How many men?"

"Sixty in all, and under charge of the officer you sent with me."

"What is the craft?"

"A schooner, and she lies just two leagues from here."

"Good! and if anything should prevent success in capturing the Sea Thief, we can go in our boats to join the schooner?"

"Yes."

"And lay outside until the brigantine and yacht sail?"

"Yes."

"With these vessels my own, we can readily capture the schooner-of-war when she comes out?"

"It so seems to me."

"That will give me five fleet vessels?"

"Yes, and make you a pirate commodore; but if you do not show more sense than you did to-night, you'll get hanged."

"We'll not discuss that matter, Diaz; but now tell me, can you get me more men?"

"Yes; how many will you wish?"

"You say I have ninety?"

"Yes."

"And the fifty on the brigantine, my old crew, will return to their allegiance when I have them prisoners?"

"It would seem so."

"That will make one hundred and forty;

but, as I have five vessels to fit out, you had better send me a hundred more."

"I can do so; but where will be your rendezvous?"

"An island of the Bahamas."

"Ah! where your mother now is?"

"Or thereabout."

"Well, I will send you the men, and I wish you success."

"If aught of an important nature turns up I will post you."

"Now luck to you, for there are the boats."

Two boats now loomed up ahead, and a moment after the one in which were Jose Diaz and his party, ran alongside.

"Come, Jose, we will go back now."

"What, senor, are you not going with me?"

"Not I, Captain Perdido."

"And your son?"

"Goes with his father."

"I thought that you were going to board the Sea Thief with us, at least?"

"You thought very wrong, senor, for I am a citizen of this port, and do not care to be caught in bad company."

"Good-night, and again I wish you luck."

"Good-night, senor, and don't forget the little balance you owe me," said young Jose, as he bent to his oars.

The two boats, crowded with men, now separated from the one in which was Jose Diaz and his hopeful, the former pulling slowly up the harbor, the latter back to the old inn, into which the father and son were anxious to get.

All on the water was dark, for the night was cloudy and a fitful wind was blowing, which betokened a storm.

The numerous vessels rode at anchor, their lights glimmering through the haze, and all on their decks seemingly buried in deep repose.

After looking over his crew, Perdido said in a few words:

"Men, you have been shipped, as you know, for red work on the seas; but first, we have to cut out our vessel, and she lies yonder, with a prize crew of thirteen American seamen on board."

"The reward will be generous, and you are expected to do your duty."

"Give way!"

The oars fell together into the water, and the two boats moved slowly up the harbor.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MONTA CRISTO TO THE RESCUE.

AFTER the strange attack which Perdido had made upon him, Monte Cristo almost immediately followed him out of the Anchor Inn, but by a different door.

Those remaining within had discussed the matter, and soon after, in examining the sword picked up from the floor, had discovered the name of the pirate engraven upon it.

There was a skillfully-carved ivory death's-head and cross-bones, and beneath it:

"PERDIDO, THE PIRATE."

Although Perdido had accused Monte Cristo of being the pirate, there was then in the minds of those present in the tap-room, no doubt but that he was Perdido himself, and had simply played some deep game in making the accusation.

The alarm was thereupon given, which Perdido and Jose had heard, and therefore taken to flight.

In the mean time Monte Cristo had doubled upon the two, saw them run, and kept even with them.

With that unwavering self-reliance so remarkable in him, he would not seek aid, but determined to spy out the movements of the little party himself.

He saw Perdido and Jose join the group, and the boat they entered put off from the shore.

All dressed as he was, and without an instant's hesitation, he took to the water and swam out to his yacht, after marking the course of the boat.

He was near this boat when Jose Diaz called a halt, to have a talk with Perdido, and heard the lateen-rig spoken of.

With this idea given him that an attempt was to be made upon the Sea Thief, he quickly swam for his yacht, which was not

far distant, and surprised the negro officer of the deck by rising dripping over the side.

"Turk, my canoe, quick!" he cried, and in an instant the light canoe was launched, and getting into it, Monte Cristo seized a paddle and sent it flying over the water.

There was one peculiarity about the canoe, and that was the exact sameness of the hue it presented to the darkness and the water, and a wrap he took from a locker, Monte Cristo threw about his form, thereby rendering himself almost invisible.

Light as a cork, and urged by a strong arm, the canoe fairly flew over the waters, and, unseen, ran alongside of the Sea Thief.

The men upon her deck were amazed to see a tall cloaked form suddenly appear before them; but without giving them time for a word, Monte Cristo said:

"Lads, call your shipmates on deck and crouch along your bulwarks, fully armed, for you are to be boarded by pirates.

"Where is your captain?"

"In the cabin, senor," said Mattocks, who was the one addressed, and he repeated the order to his men, as Monte Cristo walked aft.

The Jew and De Silva were at the cabin table, discussing a bottle of wine, when Monte Cristo surprised them with his presence.

The strangely-hued wrap was about his form, his clothes were wet and dripping, but his face was muffled and his eyes were bright as diamonds.

"Senors, pardon my intrusion, but I just learned of an attempted attack upon your vessel by Perdido, the Pirate.

"In a word, the schooner-of-war's captain is visiting ashore to-night; I left several of his officers at the Anchor Inn, and the middy in charge has no right to act, so I came to inform you, feeling that you, with your crew, could capture the boarders, as it is very evident that they do not know that this vessel has changed hands."

This explanation was given rapidly and clearly, and the skipper and the Wandering Jew were amazed; but the latter said:

"I thanks you, Senor Monte Cristo, for you vas a goot mans; but vere pe t'e birates?"

"Coming here now in their boats, which I do not believe hold over thirty men.

"I came on ahead in my canoe, and took the liberty of ordering your men crouched along the bulwarks to greet them, and the surprise will give you an opportunity of capturing them all."

"Vas that so?"

"Let me thank you also, senor, and at once see that we are prepared to resist them.

"Will you lend us a hand?" and the skipper turned to Monte Cristo.

"Willingly, senor," and the three men adjourned to the deck.

Although a stranger had ordered what to be done, Mattocks had quickly obeyed, and the entire crew of the craft, the pirates and those who had been the original seamen of the brigantine, were already armed and crouching along the decks.

"Steel can do this work; so do not use fire-arms, and above all, spare Perdido; he wears a long beard to-night," said Monte Cristo to De Silva.

"I will do as you say, senor, and rather confess to a desire to see Perdido hanged.

"Ha! there come the boats, and one upon either side.

"Will you aid the Wandering Jew upon the starboard side, while Mattocks and myself take the port?"

Monte Cristo stepped quickly to the starboard side, where the Jew had already gone, and a silence fell upon the vessel.

Upon either side the boats came, slowly and with muffled oars, and a moment after the men sprang lightly over the bulwarks.

Ere they were aware of danger to themselves, half a score of their number had been felled to the decks by heavy blows, and as many more had been seized and disarmed.

But a few, then discovering that they were caught in a trap, sprang back into their boats and pulled away at a terrific speed.

Toward them no demonstration was made, and two-thirds of the attacking party were upon the deck of the vessel, one or two dead, others wounded, and the remainder in bonds

Almost noiselessly the affair had been conducted to its termination, and a minute of time had sufficed to defeat the pirates, while Perdido, leaping into the very arms of Monte Cristo, had received a stunning blow in his face that felled him to the deck, and ere he could collect his dazed senses he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PERDIDO A PRISONER.

FIFTEEN minutes after the almost noiseless attack upon the Sea Thief and its defeat through Monte Cristo, four persons sat in the cabin of the vessel.

One of these four was in irons.

It was Perdido, the Pirate.

His false beard and wig had been taken off, his face was still bleeding from the gash given him by the point of Monte Cristo's sword in the duel in the Anchor Inn, and he looked thoroughly dejected and was very pale.

Where he had attempted to surprise, he had been surprised, for he had known nothing of the purchase of the *carrera* by the Wandering Jew and the transfer of the crew from the brigantine.

Had he only known that the much-coveted brigantine had only on board Ponce and his six negro sailors, how gladly would Perdido have transferred his attentions to that beautiful craft, and with success, too.

He was utterly amazed, therefore, to find Monte Cristo upon the *carrera*, and also the Jew and those he had believed upon the brigantine.

The other three of the four in the *carrera's* cabin were Monte Cristo, the Wandering Jew and the skipper.

The faces of the last two were radiant; that of Monte Cristo was calm, but a threatening light shone in his eyes.

"Well, what am I dragged here for?"

"Is this a tribunal to condemn me to death?" angrily asked Perdido, as soon as he had been brought in and seated by Mattocks, who had then retired.

"T'e Senor Monte Cristo vas vant to see you, mine birate fri'nt," said the Jew.

"Well, what do you wish of me?" and Perdido turned his eyes upon Monte Cristo, who said calmly:

"First let me stop that bleeding on your cheek from the wound which I gave you, for it may become serious."

"Strangely anxious you are about me!" sneered the pirate.

"Yes; I would not see you bleed to death, for hanging is your destiny; but, in truth, I do not care to talk to a man whose wound is not dressed."

"Dress it, then!" was the growling response of Perdido, who felt himself growing weak from loss of blood.

With the skill of a surgeon, Monte Cristo dressed the wound, remarking as he finished:

"I have done my best, senor; but I shall know you by the scar I gave you, should you escape the gallows."

"Vat vas t'e Senor Monte Cristo vants mit t'e birate mans?" asked the Wandering Jew, as Monte Cristo resumed his seat in silence.

"I desired an interview with this man, senor, to find out from him the fate of a certain person whom he has in his power," said Monte Cristo, sternly.

"Who vas that persons, senor?"

"It is not expected, senor, that you would know, and I addressed the pirate."

"Well, who would you know about?" gruffly asked Perdido.

"I would ask of you what you have done with a young girl whom you kidnapped from her home some weeks ago?"

The pirate started and gazed into Monte Cristo's face.

"Who said I captured a girl?" he asked.

"I say so."

"And who are you?" was the rude question.

"I am called Monte Cristo."

"Is that your right name?"

"I may not have as much claim to it as you have to the name of pirate, but I am so known," was the cutting response.

"What are you to the girl?" quickly asked Perdido.

"Ah! you confess then to having abducted her?"

"I confess to nothing."

"You need not, for I know you to be the pirate I seek."

"And why do you seek me?"

"For the restoration of the maiden."

"What is she to you?"

"That does not concern you."

"You are her lover doubtless?"

"The question at hand is where is she?"

"Are you willing to pay ransom?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Her weight in gold!"

The pirate, the Wandering Jew and De Silva all started at this.

Perdido well understood the remark, for he had left that as the price of Lita's ransom.

The Wandering Jew was astounded at such a price, and De Silva crossed himself with respect at being in the presence of a man who could pay such a ransom.

But Perdido cursed himself that it was not in his power to claim the ransom, and also that he was then in irons, with a fair prospect of being immediately hanged.

What had become of the maiden he did not know.

He had left her on board the *carrera*, and could find no trace of her after its capture by the schooner-of-war.

He had not seen any of his crew to ask what had been done with the fair captive, and hence was all at sea as regards her fate.

The Jew and De Silva knew that Lita was then within a few feet of them.

The ransom offered was marvelous, but they dared not give her up, or they would get themselves into trouble.

If they did give her up for the ransom named, they must do so in a way that would be to their credit, and not harm them, and upon this subject they must hold counsel.

As for the skipper, he confessed himself in love with Lita, and to give her over for the ransom he would have to yield her up wholly.

Thus the three men sat looking at Monte Cristo, utterly taken aback at his words:

"Her weight in gold."

At last the Wandering Jew spoke:

"Vas t'e lady very fat, mine fri'nt?"

At the motive for the question of the Wandering Jew, De Silva laughed, and a slight smile hovered about the stern mouth of Monte Cristo, who said:

"Whatever her weight, you have my offer, Sir Pirate."

"A generous one truly, senor."

"Your own terms, pirate."

"Which is now out of my power to accept."

"How mean you?"

"The lady is not under my charge."

"By the God above, if harm has befallen her, I will kill you by tortures that are infernal," and the voice of Monte Cristo fairly rung through the vessel.

Perdido became livid, and the Wandering Jew glanced at De Silva, who seemed to feel some dread of Monte Cristo.

"I think no harm has befallen the lady, senor."

"Do you not know?"

"I do not."

"Where is she?"

"I know not."

"When did you last see her?"

"I left her on board of my vessel."

"Which was captured?"

"Yes."

"She was not on board when the schooner-of-war captured your craft?"

"No."

"A padre warned your crew of danger, and allowed them to escape?"

"Yes, senor."

"Do you think he carried the maiden away?"

"I cannot tell, senor."

"I will give you *your weight in gold to bring her to me*," said Monte Cristo earnestly.

"My God, I wish I could do it."

"Ay, and offer you your life with it."

"Senor, it is not in my power to do so, or Heaven knows I would accept your terms," fairly groaned Perdido, while the Jew said:

"T'e life of t'e birate ish not t'e Senor Monte Cristo's to give."

"Jew, your interest in this pirate being only monetary, I will pay you your share,

ay, and the share of your captain and crew in the reward offered for him."

"Vell, that vas generous, mine fri'nt, so if t'e birate knows apout t'e ladys, let him speak out pretty quick."

"Alas! I can tell you nothing."

Monte Cristo arose and paced to and fro.

Suddenly he saw a face at the companionway, and stepping forward, dragged a man into the cabin with a force that was irresistible.

It was Mattocks, the newly-appointed lieutenant of the vessel.

He had been listening, and thus caught and brought into the cabin, he looked alarmed in the extreme.

The Jew and De Silva sprung to their feet, but Monte Cristo said quickly:

"Don't be alarmed, my man, but tell me the truth."

"Were you on board this vessel when her crew deserted her?"

This was just what Perdido wished to know and he leaned eagerly forward.

But the Wandering Jew and skipper looked dreadfully alarmed, while the former stepped forward to interfere.

But De Silva drew him back, with a look of warning, and then made a quick sign to Mattocks.

"Finding that he was not in danger, Mattocks plucked up courage and answered:

"Yes, senor."

"You were one of the crew under this pirate?"

"Yes, senor; boatswain."

"How came you to leave the vessel?"

"The captain and officers were called off on some business, and I was in charge, when Padre Infelix came on board."

"He told us the vessel was in a trap, and to take to our boats, find our way out, and thus escape."

"And you did so?"

"Yes, senor."

"Was any one else on board besides the crew?"

"Yes, senor."

"Who?"

"An old negress we called the Black Witch."

"What became of her?"

"She was asleep when we left, but I never heard of her being found on board by the Gulf Guard's crew."

"And was she all that was on board?"

After hesitating Mattocks said:

"I could get ten thousand pesos by telling, I guess," and he glanced toward the Jew and De Silva.

They both took his words and look as they were meant—a demand for that sum to tell a lie, and they nodded eagerly in assent.

"I will give you that sum, my man, to tell me truthfully what you know," said Monte Cristo.

"Well, senor, there was one other on board the *carrera*."

"A captive?"

"Yes, senor."

"A lady?"

"Yes, senor."

"Describe her, please."

"Ah! she was too beautiful for my lips to describe, and as good as she was beautiful."

"Did you know her name?"

"I never heard it, senor."

"Now, my man, where is that lady?"

"I cannot tell, senor."

"You cannot, or will not?"

"Cannot, senor."

"What became of her?"

An instant of breathless silence, and then came the answer:

"The Padre Infelix took her away with him."

"Good God! and he is said to be dead!" cried Monte Cristo.

"Yes, senor, the padre is dead," echoed Mattocks, while the Wandering Jew and the skipper breathed more freely.

Then he turned suddenly and said:

"Men say that the Padre Infelix was a good man."

"I do not believe it."

"It is also said that his kindness of heart caused him to allow the crew of this vessel to escape."

"I do not believe it."

"It is also asserted that he is dead, slain by the pirates he betrayed, or, rather, by your order, Perdido; but I do not believe it."

"I believe him to be a wretch, and that he still lives, and some day I will find him and show just what he is."

"Now you tell me, my man, that the Padre Infelix took this maiden away with him?" and Monte Cristo turned again to Mattocks.

"Yes, senor."

"And you have not seen her since?"

"No, senor."

"Whither did you go?"

"We left in our boats and were picked up by the brigantine, and the captain there said he would give us a berth if we were willing to lie close until he got to sea."

"Ah! did he say what flag the brigantine was to sail under?"

"No, senor."

During this De Silva looked very nervous, and the Wandering Jew kept his sharp eyes fixed upon the face of Mattocks.

"And you have since been on the brigantine?"

"Yes, senor; but you can tell we intended to be honest, since we did not side with Perdido when he boarded the brigantine to make a pirate of her."

"How much did you get for your honesty?" was the startling question; but with a ready lie Mattocks answered:

"Not a peso, senor."

"Now tell me how the padre left the vessel?"

"He had come to the vessel on horseback, and departed on foot with the lady, the horse following behind them."

"And that was the last you saw of them?"

"Yes, senor."

"You can make a cool fifty thousand pesos by telling the whole truth, if there is more to tell."

Again did Mattocks give that quick, cunning glance at the Jew and the skipper, and again did he seem satisfied with their return glance, for he said:

"I am a poor man, senor, and would gladly earn the gold you offer, but I can tell you nothing more."

"Well, here is the money I promised you, and you can go on deck."

The crisp notes were given him, and Mattocks left the cabin with a happy face, muttering:

"He has paid up, like the man he is, for the lies I told him, and the Jew and skipper will have to pay up for my not telling the truth."

"Who is this Padre Infelix?" asked Perdido, as Mattocks left the cabin.

"A man I believe to possess as black a heart as you do, if that were possible," was the stern rejoinder of Monte Cristo, and Perdido flinched under it, but asked:

"Now what is to be done with me, for I suppose you are convinced that I am unaware of the whereabouts of the maiden who was my captive?"

"Yes, I believe you to be guiltless, unless—"

"Unless what, senor?"

"Unless you connived with this Padre Infelix to capture your vessel, for some deep purpose, and carry off your captive."

"Upon my honor, no!"

"Your honor! Perdido, the Pirate's, honor!" said Monte Cristo, with withering scorn.

"Vell, vas you done mit t'e priziners, mine fri'nt?" asked the Wandering Jew, anxious to terminate the interview and get Monte Cristo away from the vessel.

"No, senor, I will not be done with him until I see him hanged."

"Vell, dat may pe some days, but not now."

"What do you mean, senor?"

"Vell, I means that t'e birate gentlemans vas comed on poard my vessels to take her priziners, put that you vas comed and tell mes, and so t'e vessel vas not captured, and I vas t'ank you very moech."

"Put I vas pe so glat that I don't vas lose my vessels, that I have no love to see even birate mans hung, and so I vill let 'em go away."

De Silva glanced at the Wandering Jew in amazement, Perdido's face flushed with sudden-born hope, and Monte Cristo looked upon him as though he would read his very soul, while he asked:

"Do I understand that you mean you will let this man go free?"

"Yesh, senor, and his birate mans."

"You will set a pirate free, on whose head is a reward, for the red deeds he is guilty of?"

"Yesh, senor."

"Jew, you are playing some bold game."

"I vas playing noddings, mine fri'nt, I only vas have too tender heart to let these mans die."

"Yes, now I recall it, this man was once before in your power, on board the brigantine, and then he was allowed to go free."

"I said nothing then, to any one, but I have had my eyes open, Senor Jew, and I can only think that you are in some way the ally of this man."

"No, senor, I never laid eyes upon him till the night to which you refer, and why he should have freed me then is as much of a mystery to me as it is to you," said Perdido, earnestly, while the skipper added:

"And it's a mystery to me, Senor Monte Cristo, which I can account for only by the fact that this gentleman means what he says, that he wishes no one to die through act of his, not even a pirate."

"Well, Sir Jew, the man is your prisoner, not mine, and, although had it not been for me, you would have been his, and he would have proven himself merciless to you, I can only say, do as you please," and Monte Cristo turned to leave the cabin.

"One minute, ave you please, Senor Monte Cristo," called out the Jew.

"Well, sir?"

"Senor, if you vas to go now, I vas know that these birate mans would be taken pretty quick by t'e American var-vessel, and dere blood would be upon my innocent heats; so I vas ask you to remain until dey vas gone first."

"I will do no such thing, Jew— Hold! no threatening attitude toward me, for I will not put up with it, so hear me— What! do you bar my way?"

The Wandering Jew had suddenly stepped to the companionway, and seizing a cutlass, had confronted Monte Cristo.

Perdido remembered well his prowess with the weapon, as displayed toward him, and De Silva had not forgotten it, so both eagerly watched the result.

The Jew had a confident smile upon his face, as he said:

"Yesh, mine fri'nt, I vas par your vay, pe-cause I vas vant you to stay mit t'e poat until t'e birate man leave."

"On your guard, then, for I will not be bullied," sternly said Monte Cristo, and he raised his sword and the two blades crossed.

A few passes, and the confident smile faded from the Jew's face.

He had met his match, and he knew it.

In spite of his wonderful skill he was at the mercy of his adversary, and his blade was fairly wrenched from his hand.

"Jew, you wield a good blade, but do not draw it upon me again."

"Now I shall depart, and will kill the man that bars my way; but I promise you, as a compromise, that I will make no report of what has taken place here to-night, or at least until that pirate has had ample opportunity to place himself in safety."

"You vill give your vords?" cried the Wandering Jew, as he saw that De Silva would not aid him to detain Monte Cristo.

"Yes."

"Is it true vords?"

"As true as the steel of my blade, which you just had a chance to test."

"Vell, that vas true, and I never met a plades that vas truer; but you vas promise—"

"I have told you what I would do, and I have no more to say."

"Buenas noches, senors," and Monte Cristo left the cabin, and in a moment after was in his canoe, fairly flying over the dark waters, on his way to the brigantine.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WANDERING JEW TO THE RESCUE.

AFTER hearing the assertion of Mattocks that the Padre Infelix had taken Lita from the vessel, Monte Cristo paced to and fro for awhile in deep thought.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLEEDING THE JEW.

"VELL, mine fri'nt, t'e sooner you vas git out mit yourselfs, t'e petter it vas pe for you, as t'e rich gentlemans might forget to keep his vord," said the Jew, almost immediately upon the departure of Monte Cristo from the cabin of the Sea Thief.

He addressed Perdido, who at once replied:

"If I am free to go, senor, I am more than willing; but you wrong that man Monte Cristo, when you believe he will go back on his word, for, though I would gladly take his life, I believe he is a man of highest honor."

"And so say I, senor; but we don't want Captain Perdido on board this craft, if it is your intention to set him free, and we should take a little cruise ourselves, I am thinking, for matters seem to be warming up in this harbor," said De Silva.

"Vell, t'e birate gentlemans can go pretty quick."

"Not in those irons, surely?"

"No. I will have them taken off."

"Vill you please, Senor Skipper?"

De Silva stepped forward and removed the irons, when Perdido said:

"A second time, Senor Jew, I owe to you my release."

"Yesh, dot vas so."

"Why is it?"

"I have a heart that vas too tender ash to see you die."

"Well, whatever the motive, I thank you; but are my men to go with me?"

"Yesh."

"Again I thank you— Ah! what is this?"

As he spoke, a number of the crew entered.

Mattocks was at their head, and he said:

"Pardon, Captain De Silva, but one of the lads overheard the Jew say that he was to set Perdido, the Pirate, free."

"Yesh, mine fri'nt, so I vas."

"The lads came to me about it, and all I can do is to tell you that they wish the reward offered for pirates."

"Yesh, that vas goot; it vas five t'ousant pesos, vas it not?"

"For Perdido, yes, senor; but there is a standing reward for pirates of one thousand pesos a head."

"Ah, vas that so?"

"Yes, senor."

"Vell, how many mans did you vas have mit you, Senor Perdido?" asked the Jew.

"Just twenty-nine, senor."

"And how many vas ve got, Senor Mattocks?"

"Perdido and four men unwounded, five wounded, and two dead."

"Vas you charge for t'e wounded, Senor Mattocks?"

"Not I, senor, but the lads."

"Vell, that vas nine t'ousant pesos for t'e men, and five t'ousant for t'e captain, don't it vas?"

"Yes, senor; but the dead?"

"Oh! vas t'e deat to be charged for, too?"

"The lads think, senor, that as the Government wanted to hang them, that they having killed them are entitled to the reward."

"Vell, that vas so,"

"I will pay the rewards, Senor Jew," said Perdido.

"No. mine fri'nt, I vas pay t'e rewards mineselves."

"It vas sixteen t'ousant pesos, don't it vas, Senor Mattocks?"

"Yes, senor."

"Vell, here vas t'e monish, to tevide mit t'e poys, so now go on deck mit t'e birates and helps them to git away, and as t'e deat mans vas paid for too, send 'em along mit t'e palance."

"Yes, senor."

And Mattocks left the cabin with the delighted crew, whom he had put up to the little scheme that he might gain favor with them.

Perdido said no more, but with a bow to the Wandering Jew also departed, and De Silva and his mysterious Jewish master were left alone.

But it was only for a short time, and they were earnestly discussing the necessity of putting at once to sea to avoid any trouble

that Monte Cristo might give them, when the Jew said:

"Senor, I vas tolt you that I vas rich?"

"Yes, senor."

"Vell, I vas not so rich as I vant to be, so I vas vish to hunt up t'e Treasure Islants, that ve all vas hear apout, and gitsome more of golts."

"I am with you, senor."

"Vell, I vas have some treasure-box of mine own that vas puried mit t'e sant."

"Indeed, senor?"

"Yesh; I vas bury them von night long times ago, and I vas get 'em now to put on t'e vessels."

"Did you bury them alone, senor?"

"No; I vas have helps."

"Well, do you expect to find your treasure when others know your secret?"

"I vas."

"They have doubtless already dug it up."

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Yesh."

"I would not be."

"I would."

"But why, senor?"

"*Deat beoples don't dig up t'e treasure*," was the very significant reply, and it caused De Silva to say, simply:

"Ah!"

"Dat vas so, mine fri'nt."

"Then we will get the treasure?"

"Yesh, pretty quick, for t'e vessels vill go there now, and ve vill then cruise mit t'e sea."

"Yes, senor, we will be under way in five minutes— Well, Mattocks, what is it?"

"I have come for my little settlement, senors, for life is too short and uncertain in these days to postpone a payment," quietly said Mattocks, entering the cabin and coolly seating himself.

"What settlement?" asked De Silva, angrily.

"Did you not promise me, you and the senor, there, ten thousand pesos if I would tell a lie about the girl?"

"No, and you got ten thousand from Monte Cristo."

"That was from him; but I want my pay from you and the Jew."

"We promised you nothing."

"I looked at you, and you looked at me, and that settled it."

"And more, again you nodded assent about the fifty thousand when I asked you with my glance if you would pay it."

"Now, senors, I am a poor man, and I had a fortune in my grasp had I told the Senor Monte Cristo that the lady was now on board this vessel."

"I did not do so, and therefore ask you to pay me."

"I vill give you t'e ten t'ousant, mine fri'nt," said the Jew.

"I must have my price—the sixty in all, or I get the girl's weight in gold," was the firm reply, and Mattocks stood now right in the companionway, which he could dart up in an instant.

"You shall not have it, Mattocks."

"Well, I can make far more by seeing the Monte Cristo."

"Holt on, mine fri'nt."

"Senor Skipper, ve must pay this mans t'e monish."

"Well, senor, do so."

"You vas pays him, and I vas give you mine share another times."

"Your share, senor?"

"Yesh, mine fri'nt."

"Why, it is all your share."

"No, Senor Skipper, I vas pays halluf, and you vas pays halluf."

"Not one cent will I pay, for it is no interest to me," was the angry retort.

The Wandering Jew sighed, but said:

"Vell, I vas have to pay all t'e monish all t'e times; put it vill stop soon pretty quick."

"Here, mine fri'nt, vas t'e precious little stones that vas pe as goot as t'e goit," and the Jew counted out gems until he saw that Mattocks was satisfied, when he stopped, though he had not given him half the amount.

"T'ere, mine fri'nt, you vas a rich mans, and I vill have to durn birate, if I vas robbed any more, as I vill be a poor mans right away quick."

Mattocks laughed and pocketed his gains with thanks, after which he said:

"Well, senor, now for work. What are my orders?"

"Get the craft under light sail right away," said De Silva, following Mattocks from the cabin, and chuckling with delight at having made the Jew pay all demands.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FOUR FLEET VESSELS FLY SEAWARD.

WHEN Perdido left the Sea Thief he gave the order to his men:

"Give way with a will!"

The crew seemed anxious to obey this, for their escape had been a narrow, and they wished to put space between themselves and danger.

As Perdido sat in the stern, his hand upon the tiller of his boat, his mind was busy.

He did not dare go to the inn again for fear he would miss the trading-craft, with the rest of his men on board.

Jose Diaz had told him that the craft lay about two leagues away, and thither he did not doubt but that those of his men who had escaped had gone.

They would hardly have had more time than to get to the vessel, and in the light breeze then blowing he felt that his boat could overhaul her.

So down the harbor he headed.

Suddenly the beautiful brigantine loomed up before him, and he muttered:

"I would give much to be able to cut her out; but I believe that they are prepared for me, so shall give her a wide berth."

And he did.

Then the yacht of Monte Cristo appeared in his course.

All was silent on board, and a sudden idea struck him.

"The craft is a beauty," he mused, "and looks to be fleet as the wind."

"She is well stored, doubtless, and may have some of that fellow's treasure on board, while she has two pivot guns, one forward, one aft, as I noticed from the window in Jose's old inn."

"He has only a negro crew on board, and by Heaven! I'll make the attempt to cut her out."

Aloud he said:

"Lads, yonder is a craft after my own heart, though she is very small."

"I have reason to believe that Monte Cristo keeps his gold on board, and you know he is as rich as Cræsus, while the crew is but half a dozen negroes."

"Drop your oars, seize your arms, and follow me; but mind you, no pistols are to be used, only steel, and make no noise if you wish to save your necks."

Straight for the yacht Perdido headed, and headway carried her alongside.

One man grasped at her taffrail, and Perdido and his men leaped on board.

But no one opposed them.

The yacht's lights burned brightly, the companionway was open, but not a soul was on board.

"Quick! get up that anchor and set sail."

"This is a godsend, lads, and we could not ask more."

"Lively! lively! and we are safe!"

The anchor was dragged up noiselessly, the sails were set, and away went the fleet craft, at first slowly, and then swiftly, even under the light breeze then blowing.

Down the harbor she flew, and just as she was disappearing in the hazy distance, a bright flash illumined the harbor, and the deep boom of a heavy gun awakened the shipping and the town to busy action.

The shot came from the schooner-of-war, and was a note of alarm, for the escape of the yacht was known on board.

Up came her anchor with a merry song from her crew, her white sails were set, and the schooner-of-war started in chase.

Hardly had she gotten under way, when down the harbor, under an increasing breeze, came rushing the Sea Thief.

Her sails were all set, and she too was pointed seaward, as all who watched her on shore believed, also in chase of the fugitive yacht.

Silent the beautiful brigantine lay at an-

chor, while many eyes were turned upon her, and it was hoped that she too would go in pursuit, for all believed that she could overhaul any craft afloat.

Suddenly, down to the shore came a tall cloaked form, and behind him were a dozen negroes carrying luggage.

"It is Senor Monte Cristo!" cried a voice, and a cheer arose, for it had been rumored in the tap-room of the Anchor Inn that night that he had purchased the beautiful brigantine.

Into the boat he sprung, his slaves followed him, and he put off from the shore.

His course lay for the brigantine, and the long, sweeping strokes of his black crew sent his boat swiftly over the waters.

In a short while more, the watchers on the shore, and vessels in the harbor, saw the snowy sails of the brigantine set to catch the wind, and then, like a white cloud, she flew down the harbor, while the cry arose:

"Monte Cristo goes in chase of his yacht."

"Bravo for the brigantine and the Senor Monte Cristo!"

Thus was it that four fleet vessels put to sea within an hour's time; but as each had a different motive, it will be necessary to explain them to the kind reader.

It will be remembered that Monte Cristo left the Sea Thief in his canoe and he headed for the brigantine.

Arriving there, he found Ponce on the alert, and, after giving him certain orders, he continued on in his canoe to the yacht.

Here he found his negro crew also on watch, and calling to Turk, the slave in charge, he said:

"Turk, get all our traps on the yacht together, and take them on board the brigantine yonder, for I have purchased that vessel and intend to give this one to Captain Herbert as a tender to his schooner."

"Yes, master."

"I will go ashore and get my things ready at the inn, for it is my intention to sail at once in the brigantine, as I have to prepare her for work I am determined she shall accomplish."

"Yes, master; but any news from poor Missy Lita?"

"None, Turk, or, that is, of a cheering nature; but I will find her, if living and avenge her, living or dead."

"I knows that, sah; but you means for us to take all off the yacht?"

"All luggage only, and my strong-box."

"Yas, sah," and Turk got his half-dozen black seamen together and set them to work, while Monte Cristo again entered his canoe and headed for the schooner-of-war.

Captain Herbert, he found, had just returned on board, from an entertainment on shore, and, with his officers, in the cabin, was listening to the account of one of them, of the duel of Monte Cristo in the Anchor Inn.

"Ah, senor, I am happy to see you, and was just speaking of you."

"Be seated, please, and join us in a glass of wine; but you do not look in your best trim," said the young captain, noticing the disarranged toilet of Monte Cristo.

"No, Captain Herbert, for I had to take to the water to-night; but let me tell you that things are going wrong in the harbor to-night."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir; and I would advise you to send a guard-boat around the harbor on a cruise."

"More I cannot tell you now, but, having bought the brigantine, I intend to put on board my own crew, while, having no further use for my yacht, I beg to present her to you."

"To me, senor?" asked the surprised young officer.

"Yes, senor; and I ordered my slaves to desert her, and she now lies at anchor awaiting your pleasure to put a crew on board—"

"Captain Herbert, as I came off from shore, sir, I saw a crew board the Senor Monte Cristo's yacht, which at once got under way and headed seaward," said an officer, entering.

All sprung to their feet, while Monte Cristo said quickly:

"I told you, sir, that there was trouble abroad to-night."

"I will start at once in chase."

"Ho, gentlemen, to your posts and get the schooner under way!"

"Fire the warning-gun, too, that they may see we are awake."

"Senor Monte Cristo, will you sail with me?"

"No, thank you, Captain Herbert; but I will soon follow in the brigantine," and Monte Cristo returned to his canoe.

As he neared the shore he saw the schooner glide away, and soon after, the Sea Thief came from up the harbor somewhere, and sped seaward.

Going to his rooms in the inn, he had his slaves get his traps quickly together, and as the reader has seen, before the yacht had left her anchorage an hour, was on board the brigantine in pursuit.

CHAPTER XL.

A STRANGE PASSENGER ON THE BRIGANTINE.

HARDLY had the brigantine left her anchorage, the fourth of the four fleet vessels flying to sea, when Monte Cristo, who stood with Ponce on the quarter-deck, said:

"There is going to be a storm, Ponce."

"It looks so sir."

"And unless the schooner-of-war has gained on the yacht, she may lose her in the blow."

"Yes, sir; I fear she has not gained much, for the yacht is a fast one."

"True; and it is so very dark, I fear that Perdido will dodge the schooner, for he is a cunning rascal."

"You think it was the pirate Perdido, sir, who cut her out?"

"I am confident that it was, Ponce; in fact, I know it!"

"It is a pity to have her in such bad hands, sir."

"Yes; and I hope the schooner will catch her; but if not, and we sight her, this brigantine can, for she sails like the very wind."

"She does indeed, sir; but shall we not take in sail, for that storm comes on fast, and the *carrera* is stripping, sir?" and Ponce pointed far ahead to where the Sea Thief was visible.

Monte Cristo gave the order to put the brigantine under reefed canvas, and soon after the storm came on.

Like a frightened night-bird the brigantine drove on, standing up well and behaving in a manner that delighted Monte Cristo and his negro crew.

Thus an hour passed, and then came the cry from Turk:

"Sail, ho!"

"Ay, ay, Turk; I see her."

"It is the Sea Thief, and dead ahead."

"We have overtaken her far sooner than I expected."

"And she has as much canvas set, sir, as the brigantine," Ponce remarked.

"If not more. Ho, Turk!"

"Ay, ay, sah."

"Keep your eyes open for the schooner now, and have your men watch on either bow for the yacht."

"Ay, ay, sah."

The *carrera* was now plainly visible, almost dead ahead, and the brigantine was overhauling her at a rapid gait.

The night was very dark, but dawn was breaking, the wind was blowing a gale, and the waves ran wild; but the brigantine went along on her course in superb style, and soon her needle-like bowsprit was even with the stern of the *carrera*.

She had just been sighted from the Sea Thief, for no one had glanced astern before, and all on board were watching the beautiful vessel with admiration, for she was now plainly visible in the early dawn.

Presently Monte Cristo raised his hat, and the Wandering Jew and the skipper returned the silent salute.

Then, in his clear voice, Monte Cristo hailed:

"Ho, the Sea Thief!"

"Ahoy, the brigantine!" answered the skipper.

"May I ask if you are in chase of the fugitive yacht which Perdido, the Pirate, stole from her anchorage a few hours ago?"

"No, senor, we are on a cruise of our own, and have nothing to do with other vessels," replied De Silva.

"It would be well to remember that when you get out of sight of land."

"Good-day, senors," and the brigantine passed on, the Wandering Jew seeming to regret having let her go out of his hands.

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, Turk."

"It is the schooner, sah."

"Yes, I see her; but the yacht is not visible."

"No, sah."

The brigantine now began to overhaul the schooner rapidly, and in a couple of hours had run broadside to broadside to her.

In admiration Captain Herbert, his officers and crew had been watching the beautiful vessel overhaul their schooner, whose equal they had not before seen.

"You have a wonder in that craft, Senor Monte Cristo," called out the young captain.

"Yes, Captain Herbert, I have, and no money would get her from me; but have you lost sight of the yacht?"

"Yes, senor, in the storm; but we will hope to find her."

"I will stand up the coast, sir."

"And I down, while the Jew—"

"You need expect no aid from him, Captain Herbert, for he has started upon a special cruise of his own."

"Ha! piracy?"

"I think not; but he might bear watching."

"He has not a dozen men on board."

Monte Cristo made no reply to this, but said:

"I hope you will find the yacht, senor; but, should I do so, I will bring her back to you, though I, too, go on a special cruise."

A wave of the hand, and the two vessels parted.

"Which way, sir?" asked Ponce, when the brigantine had held on her way for several hours.

"It is useless to search for the yacht, I think, as that cunning fox, Perdido, has doubtless run into some bayou on the coast he knows well."

"And do we return, sir?"

"Oh, no, Ponce; put the brigantine on her course for home."

"Homeward bound, sir?"

"Yes, Ponce."

"And poor Missy Lita, sir?"

"Ponce, you have here, I believe, just twenty in crew?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now twenty are not a sufficient number to hunt down pirates with."

"No, sir."

"This vessel carries a full armament and equipments, and I intend to use them; but I must have a crew, and I go home to get one."

"You will take the hands from Villa Haven, sir?"

"Yes, for the men are all good sailors, as you know, and I can trust them, so our course lies to Villa Haven, Ponce, and within the month this brigantine will be in fighting trim, and woe be unto Perdido, the Pirate."

"You speak well, senor; woe be unto Perdido, the Pirate."

The words were uttered in a strange voice, and they caused even Monte Cristo, with his iron nerve, to start, while Ponce uttered a startled exclamation, and springing to one side, cried:

"The devil, senor! it is the devil!"

"Silence, sir!" sternly commanded Monte Cristo, and he turned upon the one whose voice had so startled him.

In the companionway stood a weird, wild-looking being.

It was a woman, a negress, and strangely deformed, for her head was large and ill-shapen, her eyes small and sunken, and her teeth, grown almost into tusks, protruded from beneath her upper lip.

She was dressed in a black velvet dress, that hung awkwardly upon her deformed body, and about her neck and around her head were a necklace of gems and a band of gold.

Her feet were bare and her arms were covered with bracelets made of bones, teeth and claws.

Altogether she was a startling sight, and, at first, it was no wonder that Ponce mistook her for the devil, for she looked just

what his fears might have painted his Santic Majesty.

In a word, she was the negress who had been on the Sea Thief, she who had sprung upon the Padre Infelix with her knife, and been shot down by him and left for dead.

A flesh-wound was over her temple, where his bullet had cut its way, stunning her, but only for a while.

It was the same one who had risen from the water by his boat, and so startled the Wandering Jew, and, appearing in the stern port of the brigantine, had frightened the skipper nearly to death, and driven from him all thoughts of running off with the vessel.

"Well, my poor woman, how is it I find you here?" said Monte Cristo, in a kindly tone.

She did not answer, and he said:

"Speak, for no one here shall do you harm, and I will aid you."

"You are kind, sir, to me, who am known as the Black Witch," she said, speaking without the slightest negro dialect or tone of voice.

"Ah! you are the one that was left on the Sea Thief, and whom no one knew what had become of?"

"I am, senor."

"And how came you here, my poor woman?"

"I was taken from my home by Perdido, to bring good luck to his vessel, for it was said in olden times that a black witch could bring fortune to a pirate."

"I had a good home, sir, and those who cared for me because I was deformed in body, and I heap curses upon Perdido the Pirate, for stealing me from those I loved."

"Where was your home, my poor woman?" asked Monte Cristo, in the same kindly tone.

"On a plantation on the Mississippi River, sir, near Orleans."

"I will take you there, upon my return to the Gulf; but now I am going up the Atlantic Coast to my home, and then to search for Perdido, the Pirate."

"Ah, sir, I see it in your face that you search for him to find your sister, for I read in your face the kindred blood between you."

"I was forced to care for her, and fearing death from him, I seemed cruel to the poor child; but I intended to help her, and I swam out to this vessel that I might rescue her."

"I hid myself away in a secret closet on the vessel, which I found by accident, and only now left my hiding-place nearly starved, and driven by hunger."

Monte Cristo heard the woman's story in utter astonishment, and then ordered food for her, while he said:

"You are with friends now, good woman, and you shall be well taken care of."

In her gratitude she dropped upon her knees, and, seizing his hand, kissed it, while Ponce looked on but half satisfied at having the deformed being on board the brigantine, for he muttered:

"She'll bring either good or bad omen—which shall it be?"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE WRECKER WITCH.

WHEN Perdido so cleverly ran off with the yacht, which fortunately Monte Cristo had taken his luggage and strong-box from, he was glad to see that a storm was threatening.

He was also delighted at the speed of the little vessel, and congratulated himself upon having so easily gotten possession of her.

A run of an hour and he sighted the trading-schooner with the crew which Jose Diaz had gotten for him on board, and he headed for her.

But the skipper of the schooner saw a different craft in the yacht from the one he had been led to expect, and he fled in alarm, doubled on his course, and heading back as though to run into port, Perdido, with curses on the man's stupidity, was compelled to go on his way, as he had heard the signal gun of the Gulf Guard, and knew that she was even then in chase.

By holding on with full sail as long as he dared, he managed to hold his own with the

schooner, and when the storm struck him he instantly scudded away before it under close reefs.

When the day dawned he was glad to find the schooner nowhere in sight, and not a vessel visible upon the broad expanse of waters.

It was very evident, however, though Perdido congratulated himself upon his escape, that he was worried.

He was at sea in a small craft, and with a few men only for a crew.

What to do he did not know.

He could get plenty of men if he dared to go into a seaport; but he feared to do this.

"I will run to the island and see my mother," he said, after a long quandary, and the yacht was put away for the island home of the Wrecker Witch.

And it is to the one that Perdido, the Pirate, called mother, that I would now present the reader, if he will accompany me, in imagination, to a rocky island of the Bahamas.

Amid a group of islands, barren, forbidding, and with a dangerous channel running through them, was one isle larger than those about it.

The island rose abruptly upward from out the sea, and looked indeed like a solid rock, almost uninhabitable to a bird.

And yet a human being stood upon its summit, one pleasant afternoon some days after the flight of the pirate Perdido from the waters of San Augustine.

That human being was a woman, and one of slender, graceful form, but with a face that was repulsive in the extreme, for at a first glance none would have believed that she possessed the pure blood of the Anglo-Saxon.

The cause of this repulsiveness was not from deformity of features, for each feature was perfect in outline, and the teeth as white as pearls and perfectly even, while her eyes were large and intensely expressive, though they had a look of almost animal fierceness.

The cause of a face of perfection of feature being one to repulse the beholder, was that it was literally covered with tattooing.

There were snakes, skulls, plants, rings, stars, dragons, all tattooed in red, blue, black and yellow colors, and almost every particle of the pure white skin had been thus stained, until the once beautiful face had become a fearful deformity.

The woman seemed scarcely more than thirty-five, though she was ten years older, and her form was youthful-looking and willowy.

Her hair was snow-white on the left side of her head and dyed crimson upon the other, which added to the strangeness of her appearance.

She was dressed in crimson and black velvet, which had painted on them strange devices—a skull and cross-bones, a gibbet, a human hand and a star of gold.

About her neck were necklaces worth the ransom of a prince, for they were of diamonds, rubies and emeralds, and upon her wrists were bracelets equally rich in price.

Such was the woman known as the Wrecker Witch, and who had long led a life of evil on the islands of the Gulf, destroying by her false beacons many a noble vessel, and hoarding up the booty thus gained.

Hers had been a strange life, for once one of England's fairest daughters, she had married the man she loved and set sail with him and her child for Eastern lands, to be wrecked upon an island among savages and to be made by their cruel tattooing the hideous being she then was.

Her tiny boy and her husband had also suffered, but not as she had done, and her very sufferings had turned the man she had loved against her, and, escaping from the savages himself, he had left his wife and son to suffer and despair among their savage captors.

Fortune had smiled upon that man, truant to love, humanity and manhood, and riches had come to him in vast quantity.

But the wife had also escaped, after her long years of anguish, and had, with a heart turned to stone, sought revenge against him whom once she had loved.

Again cast upon an island, this time in the Gulf, she had become a wrecker, luring ships to ruin by showing false beacons, and riches had come to her too, to her and her son, grown to manhood.

At last she found that her husband lived, and not very far away, and that he was rich and prosperous.

Then did the venom in her nature break forth, and she sought him out, and, as she believed, gave him a fatal dose of poison.

But no, he was cunning, suspected his veiled visitor, and drank not the draught; but, knowing her, fearing her, he fled from his home, leaving all to believe him dead.

Settling in another place, under an assumed name, he had endeavored to live like a prince on the ill-gotten wealth he had gained as a money-lender, to suddenly find that his deserted wife and son were again upon his track.

Then it was that, intended for the priesthood in early life, he returned to its folds for protection, turned his elegant home into a monastery, and under the disguise of a padre, sought to hide himself forever from the world and those he feared.

Too superstitious to strike at his heart under the garb of a priest, the woman, his wretched wife, had returned to her wrecking, seeking a desolate retreat among the Bahamas, while her son had fitted out a vessel and turned to piracy.

That son was Perdido, the Pirate, and the father was he whom men had called the Padre Infelix, and whose mysterious disappearance had cast such a gloom over those who had known him as the generous-hearted, noble priest.

It was to that mother, the Wrecker Witch, that Perdido the Pirate was going, after his escape in the yacht, and now, when presented to the reader, days after his flight, she stands upon her rock island and gazes far out over the waters at a tiny sail that she has sighted, and which is on a course that must bring her to the island.

"No, it is not the boy's vessel, I see now, for she carries no lateen sails; but it is a vessel, and my beacon shall be lighted to guide her on the rocks, for she doubtless carries a rich freight," and the strange woman, her nature warped to utter wickedness, gloated over the prospect of death to those who sailed in the gallant vessel, and the booty the wreck would bring to her.

CHAPTER XLII.

LURED TO RUIN.

"A RIGHT gallant vessel it is that comes to me over the waters."

"Trim as a maiden of sixteen, and fleet as a dove she looks, while her decks seem scant of men."

"Ha! ha! ha! she comes bravely on, and midnight will find her in pieces, and the morrow will I store her booty in yonder hut," and turning, the Wrecker Witch, for she was the speaker, pointed to a cabin in the hollow of the rock, which formed a little valley on one side and the harbor on the other.

It was a pretty, quiet spot within these rocky walls so forbidding without, for a cleft in them was of sufficient size to allow a vessel to pass within into a basin, or miniature haven, upon the further side of which was a beach of silvery sand.

From the beach a small vale ran back to the precipitous wall of rock, the outer shell of the island.

In this vale were several cabins, rudely built of the wreckage of vessels, and about them were dogs, cats, several parrots and a number of birds, evidently pets.

To reach the vale where her cabins stood, the woman had to descend a ladder, once the ratlines of a large vessel.

Near the woman's feet, on the side of the cliff, and hidden from the sea by a piece of canvas, was a large lamp with glass reflectors behind it.

This was her false beacon to lure vessels to ruin.

And there, alone with the brutes and birds, her only companions, the wretched woman passed her days, herself a wrecker, her husband immured in a monastery, her son a pirate.

The vessel which she had sighted came swiftly on, and, in spite of a stiff breeze that was blowing, spread more canvas as she neared the wrecker's rock.

"Ha! that vessel is no stranger in these waters, or rather he who stands at her helm, for see, she rounded that rock in a way that shows she has a pilot on board.

"Heaven grant it be not one of those upstart young American naval officers that laid this pleasant abiding-place in ruins years ago

"If it be, I can but take to my skiff and fly away until he has gone.

"See! he runs boldly into that channel, and now rounds that sunken rock.

"He *does* know the channel, and comes here for no good— Ha! ha! there flies my boy's flag.

"It is *Perdido*, my son!"

She was about to wave to the vessel, which was none other than the yacht, when her keen eyes fell upon a distant sail.

"Ha! another sail in these waters?

"Perhaps a cruiser in chase of my boy.

"But what does *Perdido* in that little craft?

"Where is his other vessel I wonder?

"Yes, he will reach here by sunset, but yonder craft far in his wake will have to run the gantlet of the channel and the storm, for the winds are to blow blue devils this night, or I mistake yon threatening clouds."

The woman now signaled to the yacht, in answer to the flag that had been run up to the fore, and which was a black field with a pair of red cutlasses crossed upon it.

After watching the yacht wind gracefully through the dangerous channel for some time, the Wrecker Witch again turned her eyes upon the distant sail.

"That craft is in chase of the little one, ay, and it is a lateen-rig—yes, it is the very vessel that *Perdido* sailed from here in.

"Blow winds, blow, so that my boy can come and solve this mystery for me."

Half an hour later the yacht was seemingly dashing to destruction against the rocky wall of the island, it having passed through a narrow cut in a reef that surrounded it; but it held straight on, and shot out of sight into the cleft through the rocks just as the sun disappeared beyond the watery horizon.

The next moment it reappeared in the little basin and dropped anchor.

The woman hastily descended the ladder of ratlines, and threw her arms about her son just as he sprung ashore from his boat.

"Welcome home, my brave boy; but what brings you in that fancy little craft?"

"I was robbed of my Sea Thief, mother," said *Perdido*.

"Robbed of it, boy?"

"Yes."

"But by whom?"

"A padre, one Father Infelix!"

"Good God! that man again, and casting aside his robes to rob my child.

"Boy, you know whom that Padre Infelix is?"

"He was my father."

"True; but tell me all, boy."

Perdido told all as it had occurred, and the woman said, in a low tone:

"Boy, that man must die."

"It is said he is dead now, mother."

"I do not believe it, for he can die only by my hand, or yours; but, boy, what craft is that in chase?"

"My Sea Thief."

"So I thought; but who commands her now?"

"The Wandering Jew of the Sea, of whom I told you."

"And he is in chase of you?"

"Yes, mother, he hove in sight at day-break this morning, and has chased me all day."

"His vessel must go down this night, *Perdido*."

"Yes, mother, though I hate to lose the craft; but he has my old crew on board, and all must die, and the Wandering Jew doubtless has a large treasure on board."

"We will get it; but has he a pilot?"

"Only *Mattocks*, who you remember can only run in by daylight."

"He will be forced to attempt it by night, or go to destruction outside; but, for fear Fate may aid him, I will change the light, and in the darkness and storm it will deceive

him and send the vessel upon the Death Reef."

"A glorious idea, mother; but it is growing dark so let us change the beacon at once, for the storm will break within the hour."

They descended the rope ladder to the cliff, and set about moving the false beacon to another point, over a hundred yards distant.

"This is near where that girl had the beacon when she dwelt here with the wreckers," said the woman.

"Ah! that reminds me, mother, to tell you that I made an effort to rob a villa on the Carolina coast, where one of my officers dwelt when a boy.

"We found the villa not a ruin and deserted, as he had said, but made into a beautiful home, and they who lived there were none other than Mark Bonodel and his sister Lita, who was the Girl Wrecker of whom you just spoke."

"And what did you do, *Perdido*?" asked the woman, eagerly.

"I stole the girl, for the brother was away from home, and she was kidnapped from me when I lost my vessel."

"And the brother?"

"I have seen nothing of him, mother; but, if you remember, he cruised for a long time in the pirate schooner he captured, in search of his sister, and found her at last on this very rock, and he is to be dreaded, as we know."

"Yes; but we have not his sister, so need not fear him."

"I never saw the youth; but this Monte Cristo is the girl's lover, I feel confident, and if ever there was a man to be feared, he is the one."

"Well, we are safe here; but see, the storm is coming along with a rush, so I will light the beacon now."

"Do so, for there are the lights of the vessel," and *Perdido* pointed out over the waters to where the lights of the Sea Thief were visible.

"She comes on well; but we will see if *Mattocks* does not wreck her soon," hissed the woman.

Then the two stood on the cliff, watching the coming vessel, until the storm broke fiercely and drove them to seek shelter among the rocks.

For some time they crouched there, and then, above the wailing storm was heard a terrific crash, followed by wild shrieks of terror, curses, cries for help, prayers for safety, and then the roaring of the breakers and howling of the winds once more, for in those few moments the Sea Thief had gone to destruction upon the reef, and her crew had been washed into the savage, merciless water, while the false beacon above looked down with its single eye of fire, upon the cruel havoc it had wrought.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SKIPPER'S TREACHERY.

WHEN Skipper De Silva was alarmed by the face at the stern port of the brigantine, and which the reader is aware was the Black Witch, as the pirates of the Sea Thief called her, he decided not to run off with the vessel, and for not doing so, in his fright, set the act down on his part as a resistance to temptation.

When he got to sea, however, in the Sea Thief, he discovered that the Wandering Jew had no desire to turn pirate, as he had expected, and more, that the treasure he had taken on board, and which had been dug out of its hiding-place in the sands, was of immense value.

"I'll just think over what is best to be done," said the skipper, and the result of this thinking was that he one day accused the Wandering Jew of bad faith toward him and a desire to place *Mattocks* in his place.

In this he was mistaken, for *Mattocks* was the man he mistrusted, and so told the skipper; but De Silva had formed his plot in his mind, and he at once determined to act.

He knew that the Jew had a large treasure on board, and he believed that he was aware of the locality of the lost Gold Island.

The Wandering Jew had shown himself no mean sailor, and De Silva could not dismiss from his mind that he could find the Pirate Treasure Island if he wished.

Under the excuse that he was mutinous, he one day dealt the Wandering Jew a blow that felled him to the floor and stunned him.

Then he ordered him put in irons and placed in the hold.

This was done, and the Jew returned to consciousness to find himself a prisoner upon his own vessel.

Lita had witnessed the act of the skipper, for she was allowed the freedom of the vessel after leaving port, and she guessed at the motive of the man, having heard the Jew say the day before, in referring to herself:

"I vill marry t'e ladys mineself, mine fri'nt."

Lita had not been unmindful of the love, if such it could be called, which De Silva felt toward her, and she feared him, and especially after his cruelty to the Jew, whom she tried to make him release.

The poor girl had awakened to her own helpless condition, and that she had fallen among thieves.

She hoped they were keeping her for ransom, though it did not look so, and she had become utterly wretched.

The day after the Jew had been put in irons, the vessel was becalmed about a mile from an island, which she had observed through the open stern port.

"Oh, that I was only there, even if it was to die.

"It would be better death there than life here," she murmured, and going to her state-room she threw herself upon her bunk in bitter despair.

Suddenly she heard some one enter the cabin.

Then another entered, and the first comer said:

"*Mattocks*, are you a mutineer?"

"No; only I will not see that girl harmed by you, Captain De Silva," was the bold reply.

"What would you do if I wished to make her my wife?"

"I know that such is your intention, and before you should carry it out, as you said you would, when touching at some port, I would kill you."

"Beware, *Mattocks*, what you say, for I know that you wish to get rid of me, to be captain of this craft, get the treasure on board, and marry the girl yourself."

"What if I do?"

They were his last words, for the crack of a pistol followed, and the man fell dead, shot through the heart by De Silva.

Leaving his victim lying where he had fallen, the skipper walked on deck, and Lita, in wild alarm, rushed to the open port, and drawing herself through it, dropped into the sea, just as the vessel began to glide ahead under the influence of a sudden breeze that had broken the dead calm.

Darkness had already fallen, and unmindful of what the despairing girl had done, De Silva held the vessel on her course, and ordered the body of *Mattocks* thrown overboard, and it was done with no regret at his fate from that crew of wild, reckless spirits.

The following morning the yacht was sighted, and being recognized, De Silva ordered sail to be crowded on in chase, for he said, savagely:

"Now I will get my revenge upon *Perdido*, the Pirate, and my fair lady-love shall leave the seclusion of her state-room and enjoy the chase with me."

But upon going to the state-room no answer came to his knock, and then, in alarm, he had the vessel searched, to find that the captive had disappeared.

"Good God! she has taken her own life by springing into the sea.

"Curses! oh, curses upon my ill luck!" and in a fury at being thwarted De Silva went on deck and urged on the chase, for he was in a fit humor to meet an enemy then, that he might drown mad thought in cruel deeds.

But the nimbler-keeled yacht held her own well, and toward night De Silva saw that she was going to escape, when he called out:

"He is running for the island lair of his Witch mother; but I will follow him there, if I go to destruction."

"Ho, lads! ten thousand *pesos* to the man to pilot this craft through these Bahama channels."

At this a seaman came forward and said:

"Senor Mattocks knew the channel, sir, and I have helped him run in and out of the island, and think I can do it."

"Then take the helm and see."

The man obeyed, and the vessel sped on, and though the storm swept up, there was nothing to do but to try and reach the basin in the Wreckers' Island.

Suddenly the light on the cliff gleamed forth, and the man at the helm said:

"I am all right now, sir, for the break in the reef is just under the beacon."

"All right, my man," was the reply, and the vessel dashed on, all on board gazing at the false beacon.

On, on, flew the craft, until suddenly a wild cry of alarm arose; but too late, the shriek of:

"Breakers ahead!"

The craft was doomed, for the false beacon had led it to wreck, and its crew to ruin, for they were swept off to struggle and die in the chaos of waters.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ONLY SURVIVOR.

WITH the first gray of dawn, Perdido and his mother were astir.

They were anxious about the wrecked vessel, fearing that some one might not have died.

Taking a light skiff, a life-boat, they went out in it through the still tumultuous waves to the wreck.

It was terribly shattered, its masts were gone, and decks swept clean.

Breaks were visible here and there in the stanch hull, but still it had not broken up.

Cautiously they boarded under the lee as it lay upon the reef, and went down into the cabin.

A scene of ruin met their gaze, but the iron boxes containing the riches of the Jew and of De Silva were there, and they laughed and danced with delight as they saw the treasure they had gained.

Suddenly a groan was heard, and they started like the guilty beings they were.

Who could it be?

What did it mean?

Again the groan sounded.

Arming himself, Perdido went forward, his mother following, a cutlass in her hand.

Through to the wardroom they went, to suddenly start back, for a human being was there.

A man loaded with irons was chained to the deck.

"Good God! it is the Wandering Jew of the Sea!" cried Perdido.

"Heavens have mercys! it was Perdido, t'e Birates!" groaned the man, and then, as his eyes fell upon the woman, he shouted:

"For God's sakes, take her away pretty quicks!"

"Mother, you frighten him, looking the devilish witch that you are, but it does not matter, as I shall kill him for his gold, or wring from him where he has more," said Perdido.

Then he advanced toward the Jew and said:

"Ho, old man, how is it I find you here in irons?"

"It was t'e skipper vat do it."

"He wants mine golt, and he put me here; put he was deat, t'ey was all deat put me, mine frint, and I thought I was deat, too, if you don't was come."

"No, you are not dead, Jew; but it depends upon you whether you die very soon or not, for I will have a little talk with you."

"Come, I will take you to the island, and my mother will look after you, for she is not the devil's grandmother you took her for."

The woman now came forward, but the Jew shrunk from her aghast; but this she seemed to care not for, and aided her son in getting the prisoner to the island, for he was nothing more.

The Jew was taken up to the cabins and securely chained to one, and from his dejected air it seemed to be a question in his mind whether death on the wreck had not been preferable.

Leaving the Jew alone, or rather with the dumb brutes and birds for his companions,

Perdido and his mother returned to the wreck for the treasure-boxes, and these were all safely removed to the island, and buried, while the men on the yacht were not allowed to land and thus discover the secret.

Night had now come on, and the woman was pacing to and fro before the Jew.

Suddenly she halted just in front of him, and said maliciously:

"Old man, my son wishes to put you to death, for he says dead men tell no tales."

"But I would not see you die for all my treasure."

"No! no! no! you must live, and in chains as you are."

"Yes, live until the iron eats into your flesh, into your very soul, for then and then only *will I be avenged*."

With a groan, wrung from the depths of his being, the Wandering Jew sunk down before the woman, and consciousness left him—indeed, he seemed dead, so white did he look, so motionless did he lie.

But from the woman's lips broke a loud discordant laugh that rung in many an echo through the little vale and was hurled back mocking from the rocky walls.

CHAPTER XLV.

TRACKED TO THEIR LAIR.

SEVERAL weeks have passed away since the wreck of the Wandering Jew and his companions upon the Wreckers' Island; but the scenes of my story still linger in the Bahamas.

It is noonday, and the sea looks like a mirror in the sunlight, for the breeze is light and stirs hardly a ripple on the waters.

Two vessels are to be seen, and they are heading toward each other.

One of them is a large schooner-of-war, and she feels her way cautiously along through the dangerous cruising-ground among the numerous islands and rocks.

A glance at the trim craft is sufficient to recognize the Gulf Guard, the gallant young commander of which is Henry Herbert.

The other vessel is one also familiar to the reader, for it is the brigantine that was so coveted, and became the property of Monte Cristo.

She is certainly a most beautiful craft, and, though a stanch sea-boat, glides through the waters with the seeming lightness of a feather.

Upon her decks is presented the strange sight of a *black crew*.

But one white face is seen, and that is Monte Cristo, who stands near the wheel, his glass to his eye.

The crew, some four-score in number, are attired in the handsome sailor costume which has already been described, and yet they look seamen to the sea born.

The decks of the brigantine are now armed, with bright and dangerous-looking guns, the bulwarks are lined with small-arms, and all on board presents the appearance of a vessel under perfect discipline and one that would make a foe to be dreaded.

From the top the schooner-of-war had been sighted and reported, and Monte Cristo had ordered the vessel put away to meet her.

At length they came near, both swept up into the wind and lay to, and Monte Cristo entered his boat and boarded the schooner.

He was cordially greeted at the gangway by Captain Herbert, and entering the cabin, the two held a long conversation together.

Captain Herbert told his story in a few words.

He had not seen the runaway yacht, nor the vessel of the Wandering Jew, but had heard of both being seen, and was still on the search for the fugitive craft with Perdido, and at the same time keeping a bright lookout for wreckers.

Monte Cristo had been to his plantation home, Villa Haven, on the Carolina shores.

There he had fully manned his vessel with his own slaves, armed and equipped her, and begun his cruise after Perdido in particular, but pirates in general.

No word had come to him of his lost sister, and he had determined to run down to Wreckers' Island, one time her abiding-place, when she was the captive of outlaws, and see if aught could be heard of her.

Inviting Captain Herbert and his officers

to dine with him, he gave them a sumptuous repast on board of his beautiful vessel, and sent on board the schooner a treat of wines and good things for the crew, along with a purse for each, to the huge amazement and delight of the honest tars.

It was late in the afternoon when the young officers returned to their schooner, and the two vessels separated, the Gulf Guard continuing her cruising listlessly among the islands, and the brigantine heading for a certain destination.

That destination was the island of the Wrecker Witch.

Often had Monte Cristo, years before, when searching for his sister at the time she was the wreckers' captive, cruised in those waters, and he knew well the danger of being caught in the locality of the Wreckers' Island in bad weather.

But though he could not wholly trust himself as a pilot, should a storm break upon them, there was one on board who had learned the channels well when cruising on the deck of the Sea Thief.

That one was known on the brigantine as Hoodah, but on the Sea Thief she had borne the unenviable name of Black Witch.

Since she had been on the brigantine she had become almost a changed being, except in appearance, and was as kind as a mother could have been to Monte Cristo, while the black crew also were treated by her with the greatest kindness; but they could not divest themselves of a certain fear of her, and an idea that she was akin to Satan.

Just at sunset the Wreckers' Island was sighted.

The wind had increased, and the night threatened to be dark.

"Tell Hoodah to come on deck, Moor," said Monte Cristo, peering at the island through his glass.

The negress came and stood by his side.

"Hoodah, I do not care to venture through the dangerous channels between here and the island at night unless you are certain you can act as pilot."

"I can take the brigantine straight into the basin, master, and not touch a rock with her keel," was the confident reply.

"Very well, we will make the attempt, then," and the brigantine was put away for the Wreckers' Island.

It was now dark, and the wind was blowing a seven-knot breeze; but the negress stood by the wheel, directing the helmsmen how to steer, and the brigantine sped gayly along.

Straight for the passage through the reefs the brigantine was headed, when suddenly something caught the eye of the negress.

"Ha! a vessel there on the rocks."

"See her hull?" she said.

"I do, indeed, Hoodah; it is the victim of those accursed wreckers, and it must be that they are still on this island, though it being a quiet night they do not show their false beacon."

"Oh, that I could find poor Lita here," said Monte Cristo.

The negress made no reply, and the vessel neared the pass through the rocky walls of the island into the basin.

"Be careful, Hoodah, that you don't leave the bones of my beautiful vessel here, not to speak of ourselves," said Monte Cristo.

"No danger, master."

"I trust you, Hoodah— Ah! we are safe, for we are in the pass," and as he spoke the brigantine shot into the little island harbor.

It was very dark there, but the outline of a vessel at anchor was soon discovered, and the brigantine was headed straight for it.

"Ha! it is the yacht! Perdido is here, then! Ho, lads, be ready to follow me."

"Turk, lay her alongside and she is ours, for no watch is kept in this place and all are asleep."

The orders were rapidly given, and then, as the brigantine glided alongside of the yacht, and so lightly that she would hardly have crushed an egg between the hulls, Monte Cristo and his faithful slaves, cutlass in hand, sprung on board.

Down below decks they went, and the small crew of the yacht suddenly found themselves prisoners to what at first they believed to be black spirits.

Not a hand was raised, not a word was uttered, and the crew were quickly bound and gagged.

Having them safe, Monte Cristo ordered the gag removed from the mouth of one of the pirate officers, and asked:

"Where is Perdido, the Pirate?"

"Ashore, señor."

"In the cabin?"

"Yes, señor."

"And who is with him?"

"That old mother of Satan, the Wrecker Witch."

"Ah! any one else?"

"No, señor."

"No captive?"

"No, señor."

"What vessel is that on the reef outside?"

"The craft of the Wandering Jew."

"What! do you mean it?"

"Yes, señor, she came on the reef one stormy night, having chased us in."

"And her crew?"

"All went down, señor."

"All?"

"It seems there had been trouble on board, and the skipper had put the Jew in irons, and that saved him, for he was below when the craft sunk."

"All the rest were lost."

"This is fearful; but where is the Jew?"

"Ashore they took him."

"Who took him there?"

"The mother Witch and her devilish son."

"Ah! and where is he now?"

"I do not know, for we are not allowed to land."

"They took the treasure of the Jew ashore also and buried it, and we were thinking of ending our stay in this hold and leaving the pair of them."

"You do not think they have harmed the Wandering Jew, do you?"

"I don't know, señor; but some of the lads say they have heard fearful howlings ashore at night, and it would not surprise me if they were thumping him to make him reveal the hiding-place of more treasure; but he's a Jew, and loves gold too well to give it up easily."

"Well, I shall soon know, for it is dawn now, and Perdido, the Pirate, has about come to the end of his rope."

"Come, Ponce, I wish you to come with me."

"Not some of the crew too, sir?"

"No."

"Let me come, master."

"Yes, Hoodah, you can come along," and getting into the yacht's boat alongside, they rowed shoreward.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TREBLE RETRIBUTION.

THE gray of dawn was just peeping over the rocky walls of the Wreckers' Island when Monte Cristo and his two negro companions reached the cabins of the outlaws.

All was quiet within, and Perdido and his mother were doubtless asleep.

Suddenly, from within one of the cabins broke forth a wild, heart-rending wail in a man's voice.

Ponce and Hoodah turned as if about to fly in dread fright; but Monte Cristo checked them, and again came the wail.

Then the voice within cried:

"Take them away! oh, take them away."

"See! they would devour me, the fearful sea-serpents, and they have diamond eyes, teeth like rubies, and scales of pearls."

"See! they look like those I have known."

"Yes, that one is the image of Mark Bonodel, whom I killed long ago, and this one with the eyes that haunt me is his wife, whom my act, in killing her husband and stealing her child, caused to die of a broken heart."

"That one, so evil-looking, is my son, Perdido, and the other— Oh, God, that serpent has the face of a woman— Oh! oh! oh! keep off, you fearful serpents of the deep, for you have the faces that haunt me," and the voice ended in a long, terrible wail of anguish.

"Silence in there, you mad devil!"

"Who can sleep with your crazy ravings?"

The voice came from the next cabin, and Monte Cristo said quietly:

"That was Perdido, the Pirate, who spoke then."

"Yes, master, but the other, the madman, for he seems to be mad?"

"Ponce, if I had not taken the life of a man years ago, and know him to be dead, I would swear that it was his voice," said Monte Cristo, impressively, and his face showed that he was deeply moved, for his father and mother had both been mentioned, as also the kidnapping of his sister when a child, by the madman.

"No, it cannot be! but if not, who can it be?" he murmured, while the sweat stood in great beads upon his forehead.

Again came a loud wail from within, and then the voice of Perdido:

"Curse you! I have aid awake with my conscience all night, and you will not let me sleep now, with your howling."

"But I will gag you and then get rest."

"Hold, boy, let him weep and wail, for his anguish is music to my ears," called out another voice from the room adjoining the one in which Perdido was.

"I can't stand it, for it is fearful to me, if music to you," and Perdido threw open the door of his cabin to come out.

As he did so the iron hand of Monte Cristo was upon him, and in an instant Ponce had irons upon him, while Hoodah thrust a gag into his mouth.

"What are you doing, boy? Would you kill him, and thus lose me my joy in seeing him suffer?" cried the woman, hearing the struggle without and not understanding it.

Getting no reply, she came rushing out of her cabin, to start back with a yell of agony, and then dart away like a deer, shrieking in terror.

"Let her go!" cried Monte Cristo, as Ponce and Hoodah started after her.

The man returned, but the negress kept on.

Cowed with sudden fear the Wrecker Witch ran up the ratlines as nimbly as a sailor to the cliff above; but as rapidly did Hoodah follow her.

Upon reaching the top the Wrecker Witch halted an instant on the brink of the cliff, just over her false beacon; but as the head of the negress peered over the edge of the cliff, she uttered a wild shriek and sprung far out into the sea.

Hoodah looked down from the dizzy height and saw her crushed body upon the reef below, lying just where many a poor sailor had met his death at the hands of the wicked woman through the false beacon.

Turning, the negress retraced her way to the cabin to find Monte Cristo gazing upon the emaciated form of a man, who, with irons upon his wrists and ankles, was chained to the wall of the cabin.

"She is dead, master; she sprung from the cliff," said the negress.

"A fitting death; but see, Hoodah, do you know that man?" and he pointed to the chained wretch who was crouching down in fear, his whole aspect that of a madman.

"It is the padre, master!" shouted the negress, and adding:

"He it was who shot me, and stole young missy from the vessel."

"Hoodah, that man was the husband of that woman you just ran to her death, and is the father of Perdido, the Pirate, who stands there."

"He became a rich money-lender in New Orleans, and he it was who killed my father, broke my mother's heart, and stole my little sister and sent her to live among outlaws."

"And more, he pretended to be a priest, and then fearful of being found out by me, whom he recognized, he again changed his disguise, and is the one who was known as the Wandering Jew of the Sea."

"I thought that I had killed him long ago; but I was mistaken."

"Now he disarms my revenge, for the cruelty of his wife and son to him have driven him mad."

"See, he is a raving maniac, and I am indeed avenged."

"But, Perdido, as your father's madness disarms my revenge, you shall not escape me, for you it was who kidnapped my sister, and this day I sail from this island, your lair, and you shall hang from the yard-arm."

The pirate seemed utterly crushed, and was carried down to the shore by Ponce, who called for a boat and sent the prisoner on board the brigantine.

Then some of the crew were ordered ashore

and the cabins were set on fire, while the booty was transferred to the yacht.

In the afternoon the brigantine headed out of the basin, the madman in chains on board the yacht, where were also the pirate prisoners, and which, with Ponce in command, followed in the wake of the beautiful vessel.

Hoodah was at the helm of the brigantine, and as the craft swept out of the basin, Monte Cristo called out:

"Bring the pirate chief on deck."

This was done, and hailing Ponce, Monte Cristo ordered the pirate prisoners on deck to witness execution.

"Now, Perdido, you must die!"

White as a corpse, seemingly dazed by fear, the pirate uttered no word, the noose was put about his neck, and loaded with chains, he was swung into mid-air.

"Sail ho!"

The scenes occurring on the brigantine had prevented the lookout from seeing a vessel near.

It was the schooner-of-war.

Instantly all eyes were turned upon the Gulf Guard, which was not far distant, and the two vessels were headed to meet her, as she came swiftly along through the dangerous channel.

"My signals, Turk! Herbert is mad to sail at that speed in these waters, for he told me he had no pilot!" cried Monte Cristo.

"There's a lady at the helm, sah!" called out the man in the top.

"What! a lady?" and Monte Cristo turned his glass upon the schooner-of-war, from whose guns now rung out a salute to the brigantine.

One look through his glass, and the words came with a joy that rung out loudly:

"Thank God! it is my sister, Lita."

"Herbert has found her."

CHAPTER XLVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE remark of Monte Cristo was true.

Henry Herbert, the young captain of the schooner, had found the lost maiden.

As the schooner was cruising along near an island, a hail suddenly greeted his ears.

It came from the sea, and soon the head of a swimmer was seen.

That swimmer was Lita.

She had seen the schooner, signaled it, but getting no response, had started to swim out to it.

Her story was soon told, of how she had sprung through the port of the Sea Thief and then swam ashore.

A wrecker's cabin she found there, long before deserted, but in it was a keg of musty sea-biscuit and some dried beef.

These had kept her alive for weeks, and then the schooner hove in sight.

Henry Herbert then told of Monte Cristo, and how the very day before he had parted with the brigantine.

"He has gone to the Wreckers' Island, and I will be your pilot there," cried the young girl, and thus was it that the schooner found the brigantine.

Recognizing his sister, Monte Cristo had the dead pirate tossed from the yard-arm; and soon after he was on board the schooner, where a meeting took place between the brother and sister, upon which even the pen of romance has no right to intrude.

To Henry Herbert Monte Cristo gave over the mad money-lender and the prisoners, and also the yacht, after which he started upon his return to Villa Haven.

The young naval captain greatly regretted to lose his fair pilot; but Monte Cristo warmly invited him to visit them at their plantation home, and the result of the visit was that Lita, one time the Girl Wrecker, became the wife of the gallant young officer, and the fortune he got with her hand was said to be that which had been so hoarded up by the man who had sought to hide himself under the name of the Wandering Jew of the Sea.

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